



Combating Physical Violence Against Women in Iraqi Kurdistan

The Contribution of Local Women's Organization

By

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Dedication

To my wife **Shahla Abdulaziz** and my son **Tabarak**

Acknowledgments

TO GOD BE THE GLORY, HONOUR AND PRAISE!

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Abstract

Peace researchers aim to reduce violence “*by analyzing different types of violence and its causes, predicting in order to prevent, and acting preventively and curatively*” (Galtung 1996:50).

This thesis addresses the issue of physical violence against women in contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan. Violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan can be defined as structural violence, cultural violence and direct violence. The project introduces and discusses the strategies and measures implemented to combat the violence against women. In particular, I discuss the work done by local women’s organizations and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and analyze their roles in improving the status of women and in ending violence against women.

A central issue to discuss is the role of women’s agency in a society characterized by patriarchal structures, in which the social roles of women submit to customary codified tribal systems that naturalize the idea that women are inferior. Through concepts developed in social theory, I will discuss different challenges and solutions to violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan. How can women’s organizations contribute to free women from structural violence? What are their aims and objectives? What do they perceive as challenges? With whom do they collaborate? Which factors inhibit female victims in seeking help? In addition to women’s organizations, the government is involved in combating violence against women. What are the challenges facing the government in ending the violence? What is impeding government success?

The outcomes of this work are encouraging, despite strong socio-cultural barriers. The theories and practices that may alleviate women’s suffering and lead to their empowerment have come to the fore. Women’s organizations have achieved important progress, and they have the potential for more. The findings suggest that local women’s organizations and international NGOs know that combating violence against women presupposes “conscientization”. This “critical consciousness” cannot be imposed on people, and it does not come from outside. But it can be developed through dialectical interaction and start within citizens who are in “limit-situation” which, according to Pinto, are the boundaries where all possibilities begin (Vieira Pinto in Freire 2003:99).



Map of Iraqi Kurdistan

Abbreviations

CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KNA	Kurdistan National Assembly = Iraq's Kurdistan Parliament
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid
PAWO or PAWA	Political-Aligned Women's Organization or Agency
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
WAPP	Women Alliance of Political Parties
WNGO	Women's Non-Governmental Organization
WPRC	Women's Protection Rights Committee

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Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Statement of Research Topic

This thesis addresses the issue of physical violence against women in contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan. Violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan can be defined as structural violence, cultural violence and direct violence. The project introduces and discusses the strategies and measures implemented to combat the violence against women. In particular, I discuss the work done by local women's organizations and international NGOs, and analyze their roles in improving the status of women and in ending violence against women.

A central issue to discuss is the role of women's agency in a society characterized by patriarchal structures, in which the social roles of women submit to customary codified tribal systems that naturalize the idea that women are inferior. Through concepts developed in social theory, I will discuss different challenges and solutions to violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan. How can women's organizations contribute to free women from structural violence? What are their aims and objectives? What do they perceive as challenges? With whom do they collaborate? Which factors inhibit female victims in seeking help? In addition to women's organizations, the government is involved in combating violence against women. What are the challenges facing the government in ending the violence? What is impeding government success? The study is conducted mainly in the city of Dohuk in Iraqi Kurdistan, between 28th of April and 25th of August, 2009.

1.2 Background to Research Topic

The Kurdish society is very conservative. This has complicated the work of oriental anthropologists such as Fredrick Barth, Minorisky, and others, who visited Kurdistan before the 1970s (Hansen 1960, 1961; Leach 1940; Barth 1953; Ida Pfeiffer 1852).¹ These researchers discovered only the most obvious type of violence against women's right to self-determination,

¹ For more information see "Western Images of the Woman's Role in Kurdish Society", Mirella Galletti in *Women of a Non-State Nation: The Kurds*, edited by Shahrzad Mojab. Mazda Publishers. 2001:209. And Sindi Badirkhan 2007 "The Kurdish society in the orientalist's point of views". Arass Printing Press.

such as wife exchange, marriage in young age, and the rejection of women's formal education. Other types of violence present in the society, such as, female genital mutilation, women committing suicide, domestic violence, and honor killing were overlooked.

The lack of studies on violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan has different explanations. Some may argue that violence against women has only recently reached an alarming level. The development is related to recent social changes, such as the urbanization of Kurds beginning in the 1980s after the demolishing of their villages by Iraqi authorities. Research projects have shown that violence against women typically increases in post-conflict areas.² Another explanation could be that the research of anthropologists reflected the situation in the area that they have studied. The treatment of women does, however, often differ from tribe to tribe. The invisibility of women's conditions could also be attributed to the fact that the Kurds have been living under oppressive regimes. These regimes have encouraged violence, oppressed women and covered up statistics, so violence was invisible. In addition, the patriarchal structure of Kurdish society is an important factor. Kurdish women have been living in a patriarchal society which gives authority to men to make decisions on behalf of women. Moreover, Kurdish women have been sensitive to the difficult situations that male Kurds encountered in times of war and conflict with Iraqi authorities and between themselves. Before 1991, Kurdistan was part of Iraq and the Kurds were ruled under the dictatorship Saddam Hussein (1979–2003). Moreover, Iraq was at war with Iran (1980–1988), and then involved in the Gulf War in 1990. This also initiated a decade of economic embargo against Iraq.³ In addition, the Kurds were fighting the Iraqi government, and in return, the Iraqi government was severely oppressing Kurds. For example: The government used chemical weapons on the Kurds, demolished their village schools, and deported and Arabized Kurds. As the result, villages were without schools, and many transferred to the cities. Because of this, the women did not have the opportunity to seek their rights, but remained silent.

The American invasion of Iraq opened the peace process in Kurdistan and gave women the chance to break their silence and seek for their rights. Kurdish women received help and support from international NGOs and established local agencies. They began applying methods

² Evidence of violence against women in a post-conflict era can be found in many states in, for example, Africa and Latin America.

³ They began 6 August 1990, four days after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and continued until 22 May 2003, after the fall of the Saddam Hussein government in the U.S.-led invasion earlier that year.

and theories they learned from the international NGOs, such as benefiting from the Internet, and making petitions and lobbying against KRG laws. The new situation has created an environment that is freer from fear of expressing ideas and thoughts. Women publish articles in existing newspapers and have established their own newspapers. This situation has made the government unable to silence women agencies and cover up statistics on violence against women. Moreover, it has made it difficult for decision-makers to continue practicing the old Iraqi laws made in 1959. During Saddam Hussein's presidency, honor killing was legitimized, and the government used women as a political tool in its attempt to Arabize the Kurdish people. For instance, the government gave an Arab man 500 Iraqi Dinars to marry a Kurdish woman (Galletti 2001:218). The government rule of Baghdad has had an impact on women in the Kurdish area too. For example, after the KRG restricted polygamy in Kurdistan, people would go to Mosul city in Iraq to get married.⁴

Social scientists have warned the government not to further deteriorate the situation for the population and return from democratization to authoritarianism.⁵ But democratization cannot be made without the emancipation of women's status. Kurdistan is now experiencing peace. Therefore, it is the right time for Kurds to improve women's situations. Moreover, women NGOs have gradually increased their experience. Their work is more organized, and they arrange international conferences about the violence against women such as the Sulaimania International Conference in 2006.

The Kurdish autonomous government in Iraqi wants international recognition and investment. Consistent reports from United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) expressing their concerns about the rise of visible violence against women, such as honor killing and self-immolation, is disturbing Kurdistan Regional Government. The international community wants to democratize the area to be a role model for development in Iraq and have brought women's international NGOs into the area. The KRG has increased its efforts by building civil societies and women's organizations, and by establishing new police directories to follow up on violence against women, and it has annulled some of the previous Iraqi laws. Despite all the efforts, however, the violence continues. According to a UNAMI report (23-10. 3-11-2007),

⁴ For further detail read the article in *Evro* weekly newspaper No. 247. Date 16/07/2008. <http://www.evropress.com/evro/2008/247-16-7-2008/247.htm>.

⁵ For further information about this read *Emergent Conflict and Peaceful Change* by Hugh Miall. The subject democracy and democratization, p.113.

“women are burned in bathrooms, and are shot at home and at remote places, after which they secretly buried. The situation of honor-related violence is very alarming”.⁶

1.3 Previous Research and My Contribution

Previous research has described the dimension of violence against women and identified its causes. Examples are Kaream 2008, *Domestic Violence in Erbil*; Al-Bustany 2005, *Protection of Women in Iraq Criminal Law*; and Yassen 2005, *Honor Killing in Sharia and Iraqi Laws*. My contribution is to study the strategies implemented by women’s NGOs in ending the violence. I describe how their organizations work, and I evaluate that work in relation to the socio-cultural structures, religious interpretation, and politico-legal institutions. My aim is to contribute to change the culture of injustice against women in Kurdistan. Research projects on violence against women in Kurdistan have mostly based their analyses on questionnaires confirming the dimension of violence and the cause of the violence.⁷ I have found no research on the role of local women’s NGOs or any an evaluation of their work or studies on their influences on government responsiveness. This study will fill that gap.

1.4 Relevance to Peace Studies

During my studies at the University of Tromsø, the connection between the concepts of gender, sustainable development and peace attracted my attention. Especially, Galtung’s definition of positive and negative peace, and structural violence is relevant to the situation in Kurdistan. Kurdistan is in a period of transition from post-conflict reconstruction to democratization. It is clear that peace cannot be built with the negligence toward half the segment of the society, that is, women. Although there is an urgent need for research on women and violence in Iraqi Kurdistan, gender issues have been debated locally for a long time. However, the violence continues

⁶ (<http://www.aina.org/reports/froi.pdf>).

⁷ See, for example, Kaream, Hataw 2008 *The domestic violence, a field research in Erbil city*. Culture Press. Erbil. Shwan, Hana 2007 *Phsyco Violence*. Biyani Press. Erbil. Abdullah, Kener 2007 *The employment of violence against women in governmental offices, field research in Erbil and Sulaimania*. Sardam Press. Erbil. And Albustany, Tavghah 2008 *The protection of women in Iraq criminal law a comparative study*. In addition, some English studies might be beneficial, such as, Yuval-Davis, Nira 1997 *Gender and Nation*. London: Sage Publications. And Hassan, Riffat. 1993 “The issue of women’s and men’s equality in the Islamic tradition”, in L. Grob, R. Hassan and H. Gordon (eds), *Women’s and Men’s Liberation Testimonies of Spirit*. New York. Greenwood Press.

although there are many women's activists groups, lawyers and journalists drawing attention to the problem, and helping women.

In Iraq and in Kurdistan, male researchers do not usually write about women. It is considered useless and shameful by other men, although it is welcomed by many women. An important purpose in doing this study is to pave the way for male researchers in this direction. But an even more important aspect has been to give the staff in women's organizations the opportunity to talk about their experiences. This study will contribute to the existing knowledge on violence against women in Kurdistan, and the work done by women's organizations. It will provide awareness about the negative aspect of violence against women to the individual and to society, and help reveal the necessity of resolving it. Hopefully it can enlighten decision-makers and politicians about the need to address the causes of violence against women in Kurdistan. This thesis may also contribute to the information available to academic researchers and students.

1.5 Thesis Outline

Chapter Two will address the methods and the sources employed in this paper. I give an outline of data-collecting techniques used for the purpose of obtaining information in the field for this project, and explain why specific collection techniques were employed. In Chapter Three, I will look at the theoretical themes relevant to the study; in particular, theories on violence, patriarchy and women's agency. In Chapter Four, I give an introduction to the historical background of Kurdish autonomy and independence in Iraq, and the establishment of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). This will be important, as it will give a chronological explanation of women's mobilization and organization in Kurdistan modern history. Further, I outline the historical foundation of women-run organizations and the current situation for women in Iraqi Kurdistan. In Chapter Five, I discuss how these women's organizations work in influencing the government response and strengthening the state of feminism. What are their objectives in combating violence against women, and why do they prioritize certain objectives? How have they influenced their government policy? How does the government help support those who are combating violence against women? In Chapter Six, I outline the challenges that women's NGOs perceive. Further, I will explain what is impeding women's success and the reason for the government agencies' unsuccessful dealing with the violence. Chapter Seven gives a positive picture of women's NGOs achievements, resources, and of the continued energy of women

working for change. I analyze the work of women's NGOs and the data I collected in the field in relation to the social scientists' theories of women's empowerment, structuralist, and subjectivist. This thesis will conclude with Chapter Eight in which the main findings from empirical analysis are summarized and some recommendations are made.

At the end I have added appendices. It contains examples of laws in the present Iraqi constitution relevant to the study, which have been amended by Kurdish Regional Government. I also include some statistics for comparison.

Chapter II

Sources and Methods

2.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the sources and methods in which this research has been conceptualized and undertaken. It gives an outline of the data-collecting techniques used and the reasons for using them. Then, it explains the measures undertaken by the researcher to minimize the influences of accidental factors on the reliabilities and the validity of the data. Moreover, it discusses the relevance of gender in the context of interviewing.

2.1 Primary Sources and Secondary Sources

The research is based on interviews and observation. I have made sixteen semi-structured interviews and three group interviews with the key informants. The informants were women engaged in combating violence against women, such as female independent NGO workers, women activists, women political-aligned organizations, and women working in international NGOs. In order to have an overview about the situation of women in society, I interviewed men and women working in the Dohuk correction center.⁸ I also interviewed journalists and lawyers working in Dohuk court, and I attended workshops and seminars. The second type of primary sources are newspaper articles and journals, primarily available through the Internet but also collected in the field. These include annual reports and surveys of women's organizations, official documents and record documents about the laws' amendments, and on the work of women protecting rights committee in parliament. Most of the materials I could obtain are accounts written and produced by various NGOs and the government. In order to compare the differences and the similarities between the informants, I have investigated what women's organizations are doing, their programs, and why they have to prioritize certain projects above others.

The secondary sources include books, newspapers, journals, magazines, human-rights

⁸ This place is originally the juvenile (boys) correction or rehabilitation center. There is one separate section for women committed crimes.

reports, and Internet search. The aim is to review literature that has already been written about the topic. This will assist the researchers in analyzing the data gathered from the fieldwork.

2.2 Challenges Related to Data Collecting

It is hard to find reliable information on statistics and surveys about violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan. During the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi government denied the existence of Kurdistan, and there is little information about women in public files and research. Moreover, any information available should be questioned because of the state's tendency to misreport. In addition, officials in the Kurdish regions might have exaggerated information and statistics, to present a better picture to other countries. I have found some recent studies about violence against women in Kurdistan, but they are based on conclusions made on the basis of studies of violence against women in Arabic countries, for example, Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan.⁹ The situation for women in Kurdistan may differ from that of women in other countries, and it is therefore difficult to generalize from studies in the Arab world and make it applicable to Iraqi Kurdistan. Violence against women in Kurdistan became known to the people in the West after 2000 when there were incidents of honor killings in the diasporas.¹⁰ After the invasion of Iraq, and later in 2007, attention was also drawn to the problem by the brutal killing of the young girl Doa by stones. The case was known internationally through a video that showed her death in the presence of police and hundreds of peoples around her.¹¹

According to the arrangement in the higher educational system and among university scholars, a master's degree or a Ph.D. thesis has to be conducted on an unwritten subject. Thus, I was advised by the universities in Kurdistan to check whether someone had already written about the subject, or not. This means that the subject can be discussed only once. Nevertheless, I was able to collect some official documents about the changing personal and penal laws at the Kurdish women committee of defending women's rights, women organization reports, and

⁹ Dr. Jiawok Sirwan stated in his fieldwork paper about psychological violence against women in Kurdistan in conference 12–13/12/07. In *Women's Struggle Between Rights, Laws and the Authorities*. The Manar Press, Hawler. 2008:26.

¹⁰ Especially well-known is the incident of the honor killing of Fadime in Sweden; for more information about the incident read *In Honor of Fadime: Murder and Shame*, 2003. Written by Unni Wikan and translated by Anna Paterson. University of Chicago Press. Also known are a few incidents in the U.K., see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGtRVugNjcY&feature=related>.

¹¹ This mobile-phone video was disseminated around the world; it can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rgSH0h45Eo&feature=related>.

master's thesis about the women protection in Iraqi law, in addition to newspapers and magazine articles about the subject.

2.3 Selecting Informants

I am working within a critical social-research tradition, where my objective is to make a contribution toward social change; that is, to achieve gender equality and end violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan. As Sulka has stated, in cases of sensitive topics the researcher has to keep his or her eyes and ears open and keep the mouth shut (Sulka 1995). I have been careful to select informants within the same organization, but have interviewed them separately to protect their integrity. The interviewees were women working in local, international, and political parties' women's organizations. The interviewees were also activists, both male and female, working in a women's radio station, and male police officers dealing with violence against women. Representatives of the women's NGOs were pleased to participate in the interviews and complained about the lack of research on the subject. In contrast, many male informants expressed criticism about writing on women's rights, and advised me to change the subject. It was therefore easier to approach female interviewees than male interviewees.

I have made most interviews in my place of residence, Dohuk. In addition, I went to Erbil and Sulaimania to interview members of women's organizations to find out about similarities and differences.

2.4 Methodology

In the following, I discuss the justification of methods based on the reliability and the validity of the data, as well the limitations of the study. Although it is necessary to make some decisions on the use of method before going on field research, my experience is that the use of methods will also develop during field research, depending on the data being collected. In this process, the method that is used has to show it is working. As Holliday has pointed out, the researcher has to defend the choices made and illustrate how the overall strategy is convenient to the social setting and the researcher-subject relationships within it (Holliday 2002:7-9).

Silverman suggests there is no right or wrong methods, there are only methods that are appropriate to your research topic and the model with which you are working (Silverman

2005:112). Bryman consolidates the argument by saying that it is the research problem which guides to what extent one ought to use the methods of either a qualitative approach, or a quantitative approach, or a combination of both (Bryman 2003:69). There are a lot of factors that direct the researcher when choosing the best method for his or her research; for instance, the quantity of the people that the researcher is writing about, the type of questions, the research topic, the area where he or she is conducting the fieldwork, and so on. This study investigates the role of a few women's organizations in combating the violence against women. I thus adopted a qualitative approach.

A qualitative research approach focuses on methods such as interviewing and observation, as well as text analysis. Differently from a quantitative approach, which often deals with numbers, opinion polling, and statistics, qualitative research is sometimes criticized for not proving accurate "scientific" results. In this study, quantitative data on statistics related to violence would have been helpful, if they had been reliable. However, they are not; therefore, these have not been included. Instead, I base my research on information gathered from interviews, documents and articles. It is the experience of women working in women's NGOs which is the primary field of investigation.

Sofaer suggests that the development of knowledge involves the gradual reduction of uncertainty (Sofaer 1999:1103). Before going into fieldwork, the role of women's NGOs in Kurdistan was ambiguous to me. Based on what local people said, I had doubts about the role of NGOs in combating violence against women. It was said that women's NGOs are useless, their mission is to change women's behavior, and it is socially a disgraceful job. However, after having been in the field and observing what was going on, it became evident that my previous skepticism was premature. Gradually, my understanding increased and new questions emerged. Eventually, my trust in women activists' solutions grew. Qualitative research, which is descriptive, interpretive, and reflexive, was useful in minimizing my biases and highlighting new issues and perspectives. In this process, I have found that making semi-structured interviews, group interviews, and participant observation best suited my research project.

The Iraqi sociologist Ali Alwardi has suggested that Iraqi people have two faces, one is hidden and the other is visible.¹² By this he means that it is difficult to know whether an Iraqi is

¹² Ali Awardi is a well-known Iraqi sociologist who has written what many consider to be the definitive books on the history of Iraq and the psychology of its unfortunate inhabitants. He has mentioned this in his book about the psychology of Iraqi society.

telling the truth or not. During the long history of oppression, people have become accustomed to being careful about what they say. In this situation, interview and observation were well suited to give the researcher a better understanding of deeper perspectives which can be captured only through personal interaction, in addition to observation.

2.4.1 Interviews and Participant Observation

Interviews can be conducted as open-ended questions, in which the researcher has the opportunity to get more-detailed answers. The aim is to obtain people's opinions, feelings, experiences, and emotions (Denscombe 2007:174–5). The information I gained from respondents was tape-recorded. Before recording, I asked for the interview subject's consent. I explained that I was recording for my research purpose only. Many social scientists have emphasized the importance of the group interview as a supplement to the individual interview. Lewis has suggested that group interview has several advantages over individual interviews. "Group interview helps to reveal consensus views, may generate richer responses by allowing participants to challenge one another's interviews, may be used to verify research ideas of data gained through other methods, and may enhance the reliability of responses" (Lewis 1992 quoted in Denscombe 2003:168). Group interview is more comfortable and beneficial if the interviewees are close friends, colleagues, and classmates.¹³ In my group interviews, women co-workers and friends who were working to achieve the same goals participated.

The group interview technique was also suggested to me by an informant on the basis that this would free each of them from being disgraced when participating in a one-to-one interview with a male researcher. The informants would arrange between themselves, and then call me for the appointment. I made three group interviews: political parties' women's organization representatives, independent women's organizations workers, and international organizations workers.

Participant observation implies that the researcher takes part in the social world of the study community. This method can be helpful in answering the descriptive research questions, building theory, generating and testing hypotheses (DeWalt & DeWalt 2002). I used this method

¹³ Bers 1994 cited in Cher Ping, and Seng Chee. *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2001. Online discussion boards for focus-group interviews: an exploratory study.

to obtain a broad knowledge about the topic, as the subject is poorly explored and most people have negative ideas about women's work in women's organizations. My familiarity with the area, competence of the native language, and the time I spent in the field helped me to build trust, and establish rapport, which is of the highest importance for participant observation. I attended seminars, women's NGOs workshops and training to obtain information about what is going on in the workshops. Moreover, participating in this kind of activities helped me to validate and verify the data gathered in other methods.

2.5 The Reliability and Validity of the Collected Data

Reliability is about the confidence of method that the researcher has chosen to collect data (Payne and Payne 2004:196). The activities of women's NGOs are not publicly known. Official statistics about incidents of violence are questionable. I found that qualitative research method is the best method to get reliable data for the research subject. Eisner stated that qualitative research study can help us "understand the situation that is otherwise enigmatic or confusing" (Eisner 1991:58). My interviewees were women experienced in trying to change the situation I investigated. They worked in a variety of fields, such as women activists working in governmental organizations and in independent organizations. According to Rubin and Rubin, "each new conversation should add less and less to what you already know, until all you start hearing are the same matters over and over again; at this point you have reached the point of saturation." (Rubin and Rubin 2005:67). I interviewed members of most of the women's NGOs in Dohuk and came to the point that the same information was being repeated over and over again. The women's NGOs had the same aims, objectives, and obstacles in achieving their goals. This made me aware that a pattern was representative for the situation experience by women's NGOs, and I think this gives validity to my data.

The researcher has to try to identify what element can affect or undermine the reliability and validity of the data. This would enable the researcher to take precautions and address the accidental circumstances that the researcher may encounter; for instance, that informants may bring their emotions, feelings, fears, and personal attitudes into the session. It is often argued that the "interview on a sensitive topic exposes the researcher to bias" (Lee 1993 quoted in Cohen, et al 2003: 121). In my encounters with the staff of women's organizations, I was treated as someone who was dedicated to solving their problems. The informants were frank and spoke

openly, and some told me they felt relieved because I gave them an opportunity to talk about their grievances.

Assuring the confidentiality, reflexivity, safety, and the protection of the informants privacy can enhance valid and reliable data. I have held all the interviews with professionals at their place of work. For the women activists, I have conducted interviews with them in their favorite place. Consent was given before the interview began to stop the recording at any time they wanted, or skip any question they felt uncomfortable to answer.

2.6 The Dilemma of the Insider and Outsider in the Field

I am a Kurdish Muslim male, born and raised in the geographic region in which the research is placed. In this respect I am to be considered an insider to the Kurdish society. My stay as a student abroad did, however, make some informants see me as an outsider. My field of research is violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan. Due to the way in which the Kurdish social space is gendered, I could be seen as an outsider to the female spaces I studied. A lot has been written about the status of the insider or outsider in research. Formally, being an outsider has both advantages and disadvantages (Smyth 2005). It is often argued that it is easier to conduct fieldwork in foreign place on the assumption that local people take everything for granted. In addition, being an outsider seems to give informants the freedom to speak. Despite going home to Kurdistan to conduct research, I was treated by my countrymen as an outsider. The reason is that I was a student in Norway. Moreover, I presented myself and my research purpose in a clear and open way, hoping this would scatter suspicion and build trusting and cooperative relationships with informants (Smyth 2005). By acting in this manner I avoided a situation described by Walsh: If people “know nothing about the research, they are likely to be suspicious and wonder if the researcher is acting as some kind of agent or spy for an outsider body” (Walsh 1998:225). My inside status could not, however, be ignored in the research process. The main advantage of being an insider was being proficient in the language of informants. This gave me the ability to understand what people said to each other, truly observe the social interaction, and avoid interpreter bias. On the other hand, being an insider and writing about the opposite gender might influence the researcher’s cultural definition of masculinity and femininity.¹⁴ Studying peace and

¹⁴ During the entire process of gathering data and writing, the researcher should beware of impinging his or her own cultural definition of masculinity and femininity on the society being studied. If the researcher is systemized and brought up in the society that is being studied, the same care must be taken to study the gender roles objectively.

reconciliation at the University of Tromsø has, however, shaped and changed my tribal thinking about the restricted role women can play in the society. Hence, inside-outside position has helped me see the comparison between Western epistemology of feminism and the cultural tradition of treating women as inferior.

During the process of choosing a research topic, collecting data, and writing process, I was always reflecting on my own position: How could I describe and analyze a social system of which I am myself a product? Having grown up and lived in Kurdistan, I might be unconsciously perpetrating the patriarchal order that exists there. On the other hand, many Iraqi men could argue I had taken an outsider's perspective, and become a blind follower of Western concepts of gender equality that undermine true Kurdish values about women's status in society and family life. In addition, could my research question and findings contradict what we believe Islam teaches us?

It is argued that being an insider will make you "blind" to social processes. As a citizen living in Kurdistan, I learned about violence against women from brief notes in local newspapers. I read Sunni Islamic written sources about women and how to treat women, since I was unsure about women's rights in Islam. I have also investigated the matter by meeting with religious imams.¹⁵ Discussing the contemporary Kurdish women's situation with them, it became clear to me that violence against women is not related to Islamic thought, but to cultural interpretations. In Kurdistan, attitudes to women are filtered through a patriarchal point of view, and religion is used to sanction those ideas. As a male member of the Kurdish society, I belong to a category of people responsible for perpetrating violence against women. But this can also empower me to be an agent of change, hopefully by writing this paper.

When the researcher is an outsider, this can give the informants the freedom to speak. Although I am from Kurdistan and speak the language fluently, I was treated as an outsider by many women NGO workers, who thought I was a permanent resident in Norway. Most women NGO workers are influenced by Western theories on women's rights. They have received funds from Norwegian organizations in Kurdistan and were also happy to talk to me, thinking I came from abroad.¹⁶ They have to be careful about their jobs. Even though their families had given them the freedom to work in these organizations, neighbors, the extended family, and people would gossip about them. They had the idea that my research would bring changes to them. In

¹⁵ An Imam is a religious leader who preaches in Friday ceremonies.

¹⁶ According to the women's organizations, Norwegian organizations in Kurdistan are very active and are famous among the women's organization that I have visited. Especially the NPA, the Norwegian People's Aid.

addition, they believed Western people take their promise seriously, and they were hoping for support.

On the other hand, being regarded as an outsider did not work in my favor when interviewing male government informants. They were very careful not to spread any information about violence against women. One reason is their concern for the reputation of Kurdistan in the international community. Spreading information and statistics about violence against women will bring problems to them in Europe.¹⁷ However, I do not think this has affected the reliability of the data I gathered. I was able to interview eminent women working in KRG, and they were not taking this law seriously.

2.7 When the Researcher Is a Man and the Interviewees Are Women

Social scientists emphasize the importance of gender in contexts of interviewing (Reinharz and Chase 2003:73–86). Women are supposed to speak more freely to other women, and the female researcher is more capable of empathizing with female interviewees than the male researcher. This assumption worried me a lot before going into fieldwork. Would my gender be a barrier to communicating with women? Oakley has suggested that “the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical, and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship” (Oakley 1981:41). Kurdistan is a patriarchal society in which men dominate society, and the majority of people reason according to what may be referred to as “traditional epistemology of feminism”, holding that women do not have the capability, have little knowledge, and may have information about domestic issues (Harding 1987:3). The majority of men and women believe in a hierarchical system which subordinates women to men. This hierarchical stance of Kurdish society supports arguments on the importance of women interviewing women. The patriarchal system is by many Kurds perceived as a fair system and changing it is believed to create an imbalance in society. This means that also many women contribute to violence against women in Kurdistan. People are programmed according to cultural

¹⁷ In Kurdistan there is a law of not spreading any information and statistics to anybody, unless they have the permission from the Minister. However, there are always ways of getting what one needs in Kurdistan.

definitions of masculine and feminine roles. In contradiction to the above supposition on the necessity of women interviewing women, I found that many women were very happy to be interviewed by a male researcher. Women's organizations are striving to change the tribal thinking of men.

2.8 Conclusion

Although quantitative research methodology is useful to the study of violence against women in a society, one also has to consider the reliability of those sources in a given context. Statistics in Iraqi Kurdistan are not reliable. Therefore, I chose to use a qualitative method. Being an insider by ethnic and national standards, but often considered an outsider by social standards, gave me some challenges but also some advantages. In addition, I experienced that gender is not necessarily an obstacle in qualitative research. If trust is established between researcher and informants, a male researcher may work among women.

Chapter III

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework draws on theories of violence, patriarchy, and women's agency, inspired by perspective from Galtung, Stark, Flitcraft, Frazier, and Brigit.

3.1 Violence

According to Galtung, violence can be cultural, structural, and direct. These types of violence affect, intersect, and influence one another. Direct violence is an event, structural violence is a process with ups and downs, and cultural violence is an invariant permanence (Galtung 1990:394). Stark, Flitcraft, and Frazier have defined structural violence as "the confiscation of someone's rights through the use of ideas" (Stark, Flitcraft, and Frazier 1979). Applied to arranged marriages without women's consent, agents of structural violence will argue that it is in the woman's interest since women lack knowledge, are incompetent in making decisions, and men know better. Illiteracy among many women and some men, and the tribal codified customary law strengthen the use of structural violence, supporting Galtung's argument that structural violence will become a social pattern that people will learn and easily transmit.

Stark, Flitcraft, and Frazier have defined direct violence as "the confiscation of one's right or interest through the use of physical violence" (ibid 1979). Galtung has added psychological and verbal abuse to direct violence because consistent abuse may leave behind trauma. Honor killing is an example of direct violence in Kurdistan. It takes place when a woman has committed adultery in a pre-marriage relationship, when a woman insists in marrying a person of her own choice, or refuses an arranged marriage. Another example is wife beating. This is very common and takes place for trivial reasons, such as not preparing food for her husband in time. Wife beating sometimes leads women to self-immolation. Galtung held cultural violence to be the core, the intermediate, and facilitators for all types of violence. He stated that many aspect of culture, such as religion and ideology, language and arts, empirical science and formal science can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence (Galtung 1996:196). Galtung meant that violence might be invisible to people, and people may not recognize it as violence because it has become part of their life. He pointed out that the culture may "change the moral color of an act

from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/accepted” (ibid 1996:196).

3.2 Patriarchy Theory

Patriarchy as a concept is defined as male dominance over women, supported by social and political institutions, and preserved by the threat of punishment. Galtung has classified patriarchy as a system of oppression, and Einstein suggests patriarchy is a “system of oppression that recognizes the potential power of women and the actual power of men. Its purpose is to destroy a woman’s consciousness about her potential power” (Einstein in Juschka 2001:327). In Kurdistan, women are often deprived of education, and are placed under masculine control since women are considered troublemakers. As a consequence, women lose self-confidence and are unaware of their subordination. This also makes them partake in maintaining patriarchy and preaching it to the next generation. For example, in Kurdistan, female genital mutilation takes place to control female sexual desire. The practice is often supported by both men and women.

The patriarchal structure of a society makes women’s inferiority seem natural, and is supported and accepted. In Kurdistan, women are treated as sex objects and commodities when exchanged as wives between two families for brothers or fathers. Sometimes this is done by asking a lot of money as dowry (*mehr*), then using the *mehr* for the expenses of the woman’s brother or father’s marriage. The situation corresponds well to Brock-Utne’s statement that “patriarchal men are united in the shared relationship of dominance over their women and are dependent on each other to maintain the domination” (Brock-Utne 1989 29:30). Any attempt by a woman to break from the system is likely to spark off a severe backlash, and she would be signaled as a scapegoat. This situation is described by Paulo Freire as a “culture of silence” as people (the oppressor) speak to the oppressed using the language of control (Freire 2000). This idea is also backed by Edwin who presented women as the “muted group” (Ardenner and Chapman 1989).

The American invasion of Iraq in 2003, followed by their commitment to democratizing the area and improving the women’s situation, in addition to the consistent work from women’s NGOs, and the presence of international NGOs, have resulted in slowly breaking down patriarchy and transforming it into what Kandiyoti called the “patriarchal bargaining”.¹⁸ For example,

¹⁸ The term of “patriarchal bargaining” has been mentioned by Deniz Kandiyoti in “Bargaining With Patriarchy” *Gender and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Special Issue to Honor Jessie Bernard, (1988), pp. 274–290. Can be accessed at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/190357.pdf>.

women have become more self-conscious and dare to resist patriarchal structures, despite all the difficulties they face.¹⁹ It is now becoming more acceptable for a woman to travel to a different city by herself to study, to work outside the home, and even to go to the gym.²⁰

3.3 Women's Agency

McNay has defined agency as the “ability to act in an unexpected fashion or to found new and unanticipated modes of behavior” (McNay 2000). This means that agencies can provide conditions for resistance and then transformation. Laclau and Mouffe have elaborated on the role of discourses in changing practices and social relations by providing alternative discourse, indicating that there will never be only one discourse (Laclau and Mouffe 2002:38). Scholars have also agreed that power is processual. For example, the American invasion provided spaces for the establishment of women's agency, similar to the just-war theory of improving women's situations in Iraq, followed by democracy, human rights discourses and big finance. Women's organizations were fueled by insight, enthusiasm, and long-time grievances of anger about violence against women. This has increased women's and men's consciousness to analyze critically the situation of women. Moreover, the deteriorated situation in the middle and the south of Iraq has increased international attention in improving human rights conditions in Kurdistan. This has brought more international NGOs and Western investment, improving the economic conditions and developing human rights, including the legal system, and long-term programs aiming to protect human rights. International NGOs and the government have built schools in villages, which makes it possible for girls to attend school near their homes. The government has built new universities. The area used to have one university before 1991, and now there are seven universities. Consequently, the number of educated and qualified women has increased gradually. Moreover, the quota imposition right has given women a boost in joining the political parties, as the parties are considered the gate for women to get high positions in government. Their pressure on government has increased and reinforced “state feminism”.²¹ For example, the government established a police directive to investigate and follow up occurrences of violence against

¹⁹ *The Kurdish Globe*. weekly newspaper No. 129. 2 October 2007. Can be accessed at <http://www.kurdishglobe.net/servlet/WritePDFServlet?ID=93>.

²⁰ *The Kurdish Globe*. No. 134. 13 November 2007. Can be accessed at <http://www.kurdishglobe.net/servlet/WritePDFServlet?ID=99>.

²¹ The state feminism concept has been used by many scholars; for example, McBride and Mazure (1995: 3) have defined it as “any structure established by government with its main purpose being the betterment of women's social status”.

women, and the new government has amended some of the Iraqi government's previous laws.

The economic difficult situation of Iraq, with inflation and high prices of living, has given women space to work. Women have proven their capabilities in working just like men. In addition, the women's NGOs have realized that to change the structure, more than government help is needed, and they have taken the message of the importance of change to the public. This is done through consistent awareness campaigns, and the establishment of a radio station, independent newspapers and websites. They have given the problem of violence against women public attention and presented it as a social problem. This has changed people's perception about women and has also instigated people to pressure the government to promote progressive policy toward achieving women's aims. Moreover, women in diaspora are in constant contact and cooperation with women's agencies inside Kurdistan.

Chapter IV

Setting the Scene

4.1 Kurdish Autonomy and Independence

Kurdistan is a semi-autonomous region in Iraq inhabited by Kurds. There are differences among scholars about the origin and the numbers of the Kurds in the Middle East, a population that is divided between Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. These countries are silent about the Kurds and treat them as a minority. Simultaneously, the Kurds might want to exaggerate about their history and numbers to get international sympathy. It is generally believed that the Kurds descended from the Medes (people mentioned in the Old Testament bible) nearly 4,000 years ago (Cook 1995). The Kurds constitute the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East, estimated between 20 to 40 million.²² In 1919, they were forcibly divided among four countries: Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. The majority are Sunni Muslims (the religion of the majority of Middle East). The Shiia, Christian and Ysidis (syncretistic religion) are among the minorities.

Kurdistan is a tribal-based society, and the topographic situation with high mountains and deep valleys has contributed to the isolation of tribes. This has turned them into dependent and closed societies with strong kinships ties and strong relationship among themselves (Anderson and Stansfield 2003). The economic, political, and social difficulties they have suffered have strengthened their national identity and united them (Bruinessen 1992). The hosting countries have worked together in creating the policy of divide and rule among the Kurds to destabilize the area and create division and hatred among the Kurdish leaders (Gaunter 1992:25). For example, Iraq in 1975 conceded the Arab Gulf (*Shat alarab*) to Iran in condition for the latter to end their support of the Kurds.²³ The Kurdish demand for self-rule was initiated after World War I and increased since the Kurds were given independent status in the Treaty of Sèvres.²⁴ In 1931, the Iraqi government gave the Kurds the right to learn their language at the elementary level. In 1958, when the Baath Party took power, the government established equality between the Kurdish and Arab nationalities, and in 1974 they gave the Kurds autonomy status. These rights were given by proclamation (*bayan*) rather than agreement (*ittifaq*), meaning that the state could

²² Based on Hassanpour Study, 1992. Estimated number of Kurds in year 2000 projected from Kurdish Nationalist references available in the Internet <http://www.cogsci.ed.ac.uk/~siamakr/Kurdish/iran-lang.html>.

²³ 5 March 1975. The Algiers agreement between the Shah of Iran and the Iraqi Vice Premier, Saddam Hussein. Iran decides to cease giving military support to the Iraqi Kurds.

²⁴ For more information about the treaty see *The Safe Haven in Northern Iraq* by Helena Cook, 1995, p. 8.

withdraw those rights at any time (Gunter and Yavuz 2005:124). The politics adopted by the Baath Party against the Kurds made people more aware of their Kurdish identity. They began protesting against deportation from villages to the cities, and the demolishment of their villages, the Arabization of Kurds, the transfer of Kurds to the south, and the Arab occupation of their territory.

When the Iraq and Iran war broke out in 1980, Iran supported the Kurdish movement and the Iraqi government launched a massive military operation against the Kurds in northern Iraq. When the war ended, the Iraqi government increased their military operation against Kurds. In 1988 alone they destroyed four thousand villages using the most outrageous forbidden weapon against civilians since World War II, and at least five thousand civilians died (Anderson and Stansfield 2004:169).

In 1991, the Kurds were given the opportunity to launch another revolt against the Iraqi government after Iraq invaded Kuwait in the 1990 Gulf War. The allies made a safe haven for Kurds according to the UN Security Resolution 688.²⁵ The Iraqi government imposed an economic embargo against the Kurds in the north to create chaos. The Kurds managed to establish a government and held an election in 1992 with the participation of all the political parties in the region. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) agreed on 50:50 power-sharing. They established the Kurdish National Assembly.

In 1994, however, conflict broke out between the PUK and KDP over resource revenues and leadership. In 1996 the KDP asked for help from the Iraqi government to expel the PUK from Erbil. The PUK then established its own government in Sulaimania. In 1998 there was a peace agreement between the two parties, with the help of the United States. The KDP established its own government, and the Kurdish National Assembly in Erbil with the participation of all political parties except the PUK. In 2002, the Kurdish leaders of PUK and KDP signed a peace agreement to reunify the parliament after the U.S. had removed Saddam Hussein from power.

Kurds lack experience in self-rule. As Talabani stated, “We came from the mountains, we were trained as fighters, and now we have to run cities”. Gradually they improved and in 2005 the PUK rejoined the Kurdistan National Assembly (Iraq’s Kurdistan Parliament) while having

²⁵ For more information about the UN Security Resolution 688 see <http://www.fas.org/news/un/iraq/sres/sres0688.htm>.

their own government in Sulaimania.²⁶

The situation in Kurdistan is gradually changing, including the advance in technology (especially communication) and education. Moreover, the Kurds in diaspora make the situation difficult for the ruling parties. The people in Kurdistan have understood the meaning of democracy and are publicly criticizing the government.²⁷ Demonstrations were held in Sulaimania in March 2006 against the government corruption,²⁸ and Talabani called for the reformation of the PUK party.²⁹ This kind of criticism is not common in the Middle East, where normally demonstrations take place only by the government's permission, and address imperialism through the attack of other states verbally or by burning their flags. The situation in Kurdistan can be seen as a good sign of improvement.

4.2 The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG)

The Kurdish Regional Government is based in the capital Erbil, and controls the three Kurdish provinces. The KRG consists of a parliament, the Iraq's Kurdistan Parliament, which is divided into the legislative branch and the executive branch, made up of a cabinet of ministers.³⁰ Elections are held every four years. There are one hundred, eleven seats in the assembly. Currently (2008), women hold twenty-nine seats making up to 27% of the KNA. According to the law, 25% must be women. Three women have been appointed to the new KRG cabinet out of forty-two ministers.³¹ However, there are no women in the politburos of the two ruling parties, PDK and PUK. The Kurdistan Parliament has increased the quota for women to 30%. This will be implemented in the upcoming election on 19 May 2009.

²⁶ Cited in Gaunter presentation paper in 2006 World Congress of KURDISH STUDIES in Erbil.

²⁷ KRG president Massoud Barzani recently declared that "civilians have the right to criticize the establishments and institutions of the Kurdistan Regional Government for the current shortcomings, but they should also remember that these establishments are there to serve them, and it takes time to completely overcome existing problems." (Quoted in Gaunter 2006).

²⁸ For more information about the demonstrations see Robert F. Worth, "Memorial Gathering in Iraqi Kurdistan Turns to Violence," *New York Times*, 17 March 2006. Accessed 05/01/2009.
<http://tech.mit.edu/V126/N12/12long1.html>

²⁹ For more information read *The Kurdish Globe*, Tuesday, 13 June 2006 - No. 61, p. 5. Accessed 04/01/2009.
http://www.hewlerglobe.net/pdf/issues_61/5.pdf.

³⁰ The KRG parliament was formerly called the Kurdistan National Assembly; it changed its name to Iraq's Kurdistan Parliament on 11/02/2009.

³¹ Ms. Chinar Saad Abdullah, as the Minister for Martyrs and Victims of the Anfal; Ms. Nazanin Mohammad Waso, as Minister for Municipalities; and Widad Khurshid Osman, as Minister for Industry. For more information about ministers names and duties, and about KRG see
<http://www.krg.org/articles/detail.asp?nr=159&lngnr=12&anr=10938&smap=04060000>.

The main objective of Kurdish Regional Government is to serve the interest of all social classes fairly, resolve the conflicts between them peacefully with justice, fight inequality, support the disadvantaged groups' rights (men and women), and improve the services that the whole society needs. Moreover, the Americans are committed to improve women's situation in Iraq. Therefore, improving women's situation is an obligation. The international NGOs in Kurdistan have propelled the process that reveals the suppression of disadvantaged groups. The KRG has improved some aspects of the human rights situation, such as the situation in the prisons.

The international conventions that Iraq has ratified compel the KRG to pay attention to the rights of individuals and disadvantaged groups. KRG knows that stability and prosperity, and international recognition for self-government will be not implemented if the assumption is that the Kurds are unable to handle self-governance (Wagner 2003). Thus, the KRG has to stop the violations of women's rights as they are articulated in Kurdish daily newspapers and documented in international reports, such as UN Human Rights Watch.

4.3 Women's Situation in Iraqi Kurdistan in Recent History

Kurdish women's organizations have experienced four distinct time periods in recent history. The first ranges from 1910 to 1950. According to social scientists, women during this period had a certain amount of freedom. During the period from 1950 to 1979, women both gained and lost rights, while the awareness of women's emancipation worldwide was in its beginning. During the period from 1979 to 1990, women were deprived of many rights. The government was very oppressive and did not approve of resistance. Since the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, women's issues in Iraq are consistently being used as a political agenda by Bush to legitimize the invasion of Iraq. On the other hand, the presence and power of international NGOs and their position in the world have given women in Kurdistan some space to seek for their rights.

The right to equal status between men and women has long been a favorite topic in Kurdish periodic papers. In 1913, Ulviye, the wife of Mevlanzade Rifat, supervised the publication of a journal called *Women's World* (Kadinlar Dunyast) which continued to be published until 1921. Men also supported women's empowerment, such as Abdullah Cevdet and Kasim Emin, who wrote the famous book called *The Freedom of Women* in 1908 (Alakom 2001:57–8). At a time when the Kurds were experiencing great difficulties, the first Kurdish

women's organization, *The Society for the Advancement of Kurdish Women* (Kurd kadinalri Teali Cemiyeti) was established in Istanbul in 1919. The objective of the organization was to fight for Kurdish rights and the advancement of women (Alakom 2001:54). Therefore, in Kurdistan as elsewhere, the irony is that men have used feminism when it suited their purposes, and ignored it when it did not. The Kurds have connected the liberation of land with the liberation of women (Mojab 2001b). Looking at Kurdish history, we find many examples that support this argument. Studying the history of women's organizations in a tribal feudal-based society like the Kurdish one, the researcher has to bear in mind how patriarchy and nationalism is related with gender.

The first Kurdish autonomy in Iraqi Kurdistan was formed in 1919–1923. The status of women in the society was not mentioned or discussed (Mojab 2001:128). Then, in the constitution of the Kurdish Democratic Party in 1945, before the establishment of Kurdish republic (*Mahabad*) in Iran, it was stated in chapter 2, articles 4 and 5, and chapter 4, article 21, that the principles of the party were based on democracy and gender equality.³² But when they gained independence, they did not respect women's rights to own land (Mojab, 2001a:78–83). Later, the Iraqi regime was not any better in the way they treated women. However, between 1980 and 1988, the Iraqi government issued certain laws in favor of women when Iraq was in need of workers to substitute men engaged in the war with Iran. Other laws clearly discriminated both men and women's rights. Laws encouraged a woman to divorce her husband in the event he escaped from military service.³³ On the other hand, men were given a grant if they would take a widow as a second wife. There was only one women's organization in the Saddam era called *The Iraqi Women Unions*, but a local chapter was formed in every Iraqi city.³⁴

Most travelers and social anthropologists doing fieldwork in Kurdistan in the 1970s agree that Kurdish women were free to associate with men, also strangers and guests (Galletti 2001: 210).³⁵ However, many researchers did not pay much attention to gender issues, but discussed

³² On 22, January 1946, Qazi Muhammad announced the formation of the Republic of Mahabad in northwestern Iran; it collapsed in December 1946 when the Soviet Union left Tehran and signed an agreement to establish a joint Soviet-Irano oil company. As a consequence, the Kurds were abandoned for the sake of oil supplies. For more information read *The Tragic History of the Kurds* by John Bulloch and Harvey Morris; chapter five "The Republic of Mahabad" pp.98–118.

³³ For more information, see Hamawand Mohammed, *The women between the Sharia (Islamic Law), laws and politics*. And also Iraqi law No. 3081. Date 20/01/1986.

³⁴ This women organization was a governmental Baath party organization, the membership condition was to be affiliated with Baath party first, the objective was to make women join the party.

³⁵ I am referring to Edmund Leach, Fredreick Barth, Henry Hansen, Henny Harald Hansen, Wolfgang Rudolph, Wolf-Dieter Hutteroth, Martin van Bruinessen, Leszek Dziel, and Minorsky Vladimir.

social structures and kinship. This may have been because of the nonexistence of gender awareness at the time, except the field research of the Danish researcher Henny Harald Hansen who made a major contribution to the research about the life of Kurdish women. Since the 1990s, I have noticed that women's organizations were founded with great difficulties. For example, in 2000 the PUK armed forces ordered the closing down of independent women's NGOs offices in Sulaimania. The office was given 30 minutes to close down. This decision was undertaken by the government, and when members of the women's organization protested against the decision, they were arrested.

The presence of the international communities in Kurdistan since 2003 has led to the establishment of independent women's NGOs. As a result, women have lobbied, established offices, and asked the government about the violation of their rights. Recent research in Kurdistan shows that the violence against women is at an alarming level. The violence committed includes psychological violence (Hana 2007), domestic violence (Hataw 2008, Mohammed and Bokani 2003), and employment violence against women in governmental offices (Abdullah 2007). In addition, there is widespread physical violence, such as honor killing, self-immolation, female genital mutilation, and nose and tongue cutting.³⁶ Reports on such incidents of violence can be found in the press, and are topics for discussion among citizens. Since 2003, serious attempts have been made by the Iraqi Baghdad government and the new constitution to resolve violence against women.³⁷ The Kurdish Regional Government, moreover, has opened and supported civil society institutions.³⁸ Furthermore, they have established police directories in the three provinces in the KRG area to follow up on reports of violence against women.

In some respects, women's situations have improved. In 2000, before the invasion, an Iraqi woman would not drive alone on the motorway.³⁹ It would have been uncommon for a

³⁶ There were general agreements among my informants that a lot of women commit suicide or self-immolation in order to get away from the punishments inflicted by men, as the Iraqi laws are strict concerning the committing of suicide or self-immolation, and also the authorities may not have the facilities to investigate the crimes. In addition the woman who commits suicide may be influenced by men who close all the gates in front of her, or by consistent beating.

³⁷ In the Iraqi new constitution for example Article 2: Section C: No law that contradicts the rights and basic freedoms stipulated in this constitution may be established.

³⁸ According to women's NGOs, it is estimated that there are more than four hundred civil society NGOs in Kurdistan. It is an estimated number because many of them are just names, and some of them close and reopen their offices from time to time, depending on government funds.

³⁹ Six thousand, twenty-six women obtained driver's licenses in 2006 and 2007. This is according to Ali Salhaddin, the manager of traffic headquarters in Dohuk, mentioned in *The Evro Newspaper* No. 197, dated 11/07/2007.

woman to visit another city alone and live there to finish her studies, or to go abroad to study. This would have been considered shameful and abnormal. In other respects, violence against women continues, despite new law enforcements to produce the opposite effect. Killing women in the name of honor was lawful before 2001. Men would kill women in public, and women were killed and left unburied in remote areas. Although the law was changed in 2001, many women's organizations state that the enforcement of the law came only after the U.S. invasion in 2003. However, after criminalizing honor killing, women are now killed (often burned in bathrooms at home) and buried secretly.⁴⁰ Reports of self-immolation and suicide by women have risen since then. Despite the government's efforts in ending the violence, the unprecedented and unexpected social changes have increased the violence. For example, in the previous year there have been many incidents of physical violence caused by mobile phones. People were photographed while flirting, their voices recorded, and disseminated among friends. Once their family knew about it, they used physical violence against them or killed them. According to statistics of 2006, there were 170 cases recorded while the figure is doubled in 2007 to 350 cases. Hence, the government has issued a law stating that it will fine or imprison an "individual who distributes video, audio, or photos that deemed to damage the honor of women".⁴¹ For Kurdish women, the inside of the house is often as equally dangerous as the outside.⁴²

⁴⁰ This is according to women's organizations, women activists, and recent UN mission reports UNAMI 23-10. 3/11/2007. In addition, it is general knowledge that people may die and are buried without being reported to the government.

⁴¹ *The Kurdish Globe* (2008b) weekly newspaper No. 158 of 14/05/2008.

⁴² Domestic violence is also discussed by Hataw, 2007.

Chapter V
Agents of Societal Change

“The circumstances create the need, and the need, when it is great enough, creates the circumstances.” José Saramago in Goodwin and Jasper 2004: vii).

5.0 Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the various local and international NGOs working in Kurdistan. It describes some of their strategies and the Kurdish Regional Government’s activities regarding combating violence against women. It looks at the challenges they face, and how they work to influence government response.

5.1 International and Local Non-Governmental Organizations

The presence of NGOs and UN organizations started after the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region was established in 1991. Most of the NGOs and UN organizations were multiple-mandate agencies. They did not specify in undertaking one single domain, perhaps because of all the work that was needed in the region.⁴³ The UN organizations have focused on the reconstruction of the infrastructures, such as building bridges, schools and health clinics, and introducing literacy programs in villages. The international NGOs were engaged in distributing food and providing basics needs for the inhabitants. The American commitment to change women’s situation has rapidly increased the numbers of women’s NGOs.⁴⁴ Present are the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Women’s Democracy Initiative (WDI), National Endowment for Democracy (NED), National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republican Institute (IRI), and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). In addition, there are European NGOs such as the Swedish organization Diakonia,⁴⁵ the Germany organization Wadi,⁴⁶

⁴³ One of the principle aims of the UN activities and civil cluster (9): “Empowering emerging civil society organizations in the areas of human rights, gender, child protection, media and the environment to play an active role in thereconstruction of the country socially, politically, economically, and physically”. For more information see <http://www.uniraq.org/clusters/cluster9.asp>.

⁴⁴ For more information see CRS Report for Congress Updated 13 March 2006. p. 14. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL32376.pdf>.

⁴⁵ For more information about the organization and its work in the region see http://www.diakonia.se/documents/public/where_we_work/middle_east/countryleaflet_iraq.pdf.

⁴⁶ This organization is specialized in tackling the female genital mutilation; for more information about their activities in Kurdistan see <http://www.wadinet.de/index.php>.

and the Norwegian People's Aid (NPA).⁴⁷ I interviewed most project managers of the above mentioned organizations. Writing about them all is beyond the scope of the thesis, and as most of them were concerns about writing about their projects and activities.⁴⁸ The NPA did not have any concern about writing about them. Moreover, the Norwegian People's Aid has built independent women NGOs and I will use it as an example of the goals and activities of the international NGOs in terms of empowering and fighting violence against women.

5.1.1 The Norwegian People's Aid

The Norwegian People's Aid is a nonprofit partnership organization. It established its main office in the Sulaimania region in 1995. Their first target was reconstruction and a land de-mining project. Later, they focused on civil projects, running gender-awareness programs, utilizing their skills in other organizations and institutions, and contributing to research about the condition of women.⁴⁹ They also empower women economically by distributing sheep to widows of Anfal.⁵⁰

Norwegian People's Aid offers gender-equality training courses for men and women in the three provinces of Kurdistan to become gender-equality trainers. They have brought teachers from Norway to run the courses. Moreover, they have funded projects for different local women's NGOs, such as Pana, a women's organization, and their shelter in Kirkuk. They work for human rights, and arrange democracy seminars and workshops. They are now in the process of changing primary school books to make them sensitive to gender equality.⁵¹ They have established the two most active local women's organizations, Asuda⁵² combating violence against women, and People Development Association, PDA.⁵³ I will present Asuda as an example of local women's NGOs, and how the presence of international NGOs has a positive effect on the development in Kurdistan.

⁴⁷ For more information about their activities see <http://www.npaid.org/IPS?id=417&module=Articles&action=ArticleFolder.publicOpenFolder>.

⁴⁸ This might be because of the security reasons and most of them work as partnerships.

⁴⁹ They have done surveys and made a book of two big volumes about the situation of women, widows and girls in Kurdistan.

⁵⁰ Name of the military operation of 1988 against the Kurds.

⁵¹ According to an employee working with NPA, gender inequality has been institutionalized. The primary school books were constituted of a lot of examples, pictures, and names that encouraged the differentiation of girls' and boys' work, such as encouraging men to work outside and encouraging women to work inside. The names given to girls were sweet and weak, for example Nazek (weak), and strong names were given to boys, for example Shoresh (revolution).

⁵² For more information about the organizations see <http://www.asuda.org/>.

⁵³ For more information about the organization see <http://www.xelik.com/EN/index.asp>.

5.1.2 Asuda, a Local NGO

Asuda was founded 24 December 2000, by The Norwegian People's Aid. In 2002, it became independent and worked as a partner with other NGOs. They are financially supported by donors. The organization's aims and objective is to eradicating violence against women, create awareness of the negative aspects of violence, reinforcing the public opinion about violence against women, and lobbying for changing laws that are against women's rights.⁵⁴ The organization's work is divided into three sections: the protection, the awareness, and the research section. In the protection section, they provide counseling for female victims of violence. They mediate between the victim and the perpetrators, and make the perpetrator aware that violation of women's rights is against the law. If the case has not been resolved, or if the woman needs her case to be dealt with in court, they provide free access to lawyers. If the woman does not have a safe place to live while her case is in the process of resolving, they provide her with shelter. Moreover, they provide protection for prostitutes and women under the threat of being killed by their relatives. They accept women of all ages.⁵⁵ In the awareness section, they launch awareness campaigns about violence against women in rural areas; provide literacy programs, computer-learning skills, and manual skills such as sewing. They also offer gender-equality programs, give seminars, and produce radio programs. In the research section, they do research, and write reports and books about violence against women.⁵⁶

5.1.3 Political-Aligned Women Agency, PAWA

The cultural pluralism existing since 1991 has given birth to different ideologies and different political groups. This has created an environment of competition among political parties in showing off as models of democracy. Equality between men and women has become the motto of all political parties, and they establish women's organizations within their parties to get votes and to have a good international reputation. Four main approaches can be found within these

⁵⁴ Quoted from their leaflet. In addition, this can be found in their web page.

⁵⁵ Prostitution is against the law; the prostitute can be punished by any member of the community and usually is killed.

⁵⁶ Examples: "The Domestic Violence in Sulaimania and Garmian District" written by Mohammed Awat. "Monitoring Women's Rights in Kurdistan" written by Mohammed Awat. "The Violence Against Widows and How to Protect Oneself", and many more.

organizations: 1) Secular feminism, held by women's organizations of communist parties who respect universal human rights. 2) Islamic feminism, held by religious people who respect some of the universal human rights, but think that Islam has given women full rights. They do, however, support the deprivation of a woman's right to divorce, to inherit and to refuse polygamy, and their argument based on Quran and Hadith.⁵⁷ 3) Islamic and secular feminism, held by those who think some of the Islamic law cannot be applied in today's society. They think that women who work like men should have equal pay and rights to, for example, divorce. They also want to ban polygamy. 4) A mixture of cultural and Islam-based attitudes that suggest depriving a woman of the right to choose her husband, and promotes killing women to retain honor. As I will show later, I find such interpretations of Islam to be based on misinterpretation.

Two of the most influential and powerful women political-aligned organizations in the region are the women's unions of KDP and PUK. Their aims are quite similar, but there are slight differences in the apparatus that is used to end violence against women. Their aims are to encourage women to join politics to prepare them to engage in governmental positions and increase women's chances of getting better jobs. This will make them stronger in their demands for their rights. They organize seminars, literacy programs and workshops, and provide training in the villages to inform women about their rights. They support women shelters, and police directories to follow up on reports of violence against women.⁵⁸ They have issued newspapers and magazines, for example, *The Voice of Women*, magazine of the women's union of KDP, and *Tawer* and *Jian*, magazines of the women's union of PUK. These papers are dedicated to women's issues. The women's agency of PUK has made twenty short films about violence against women. The films have participated in international festivals. They also make one weekly TV program about violence against women and the role of women in society. In 2009, they plan to make another five short films about violence against women.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Quran is the holy Islam book and Hadith is the book of the sayings of the Prophet.

⁵⁸ The both parties have a social-problem section within their organizations, and they solve women's problems and provide free lawyers to women victims of violence. Moreover, the government also has one shelter in every province; these shelters were established by international NGOs, and then they have been given to government to run it. For example the Diakonia international NGO has founded the Dohuk women rehabilitation centre, where there is a shelter for women.

⁵⁹ This information was obtained by interviewing Nasreen Abdulah, the head manager of information in the women's union of PUK. Also interviewed was Aisha, the lawyer in the women's union of KDP.

5.1.4 Women's Alliance of Political Parties, WAPP

The Women's Alliance of Political Parties was established by an international NGO and is found in every province in Iraq.⁶⁰ Members from all provinces gathered in conferences to share ideas and benefit from their experiences in ending violence against women. The women's alliance of political parties of Dohuk was, for example, founded on 30 March 2006. The members have been given intensive courses and training about how to lead NGOs, how to defend their rights, and how to make reports. The training is sponsored by international NGOs. The members gathered weekly and when necessary. Their aim is to make consistent surveys and to monitor the implementation of government-issued laws in government agencies, and other issues concerning deprivation of women in the society. They make reports about violations and send it to the Women Protecting Rights Committee (WPRC) in the parliament. They will study the report, give their comments and send it to the cabinet of ministers to deal with it. This alliance has reported many interesting violations of women's rights and has been successful in their work.⁶¹ The Women's Alliance of Political Parties has good collaboration with the women's NGOs. They can easily mobilize women and make petitions.⁶²

5.1.5 Women's Protection Rights Committee, WPRC

The Women's Protection Rights Committee consists of eleven female members. It was founded on the 16 June 2005 and their first meeting held on 5 July 2005. The committee is engaged in policy-formulating laws through the power of the legislative body of the Kurdish Parliament. The committee comments and participates in every decision concerning women, before the issuing of the final draft. The committee has good relation with all NGOs.⁶³ The committee has succeeded in passing several laws to the parliament for discussion; the most recent one is their attempt to change the personal status laws of 1959. The committee has sent their proposals to all NGOs and KRG Islamic affairs, as well as to all government offices for comments. They have made

⁶⁰ I have been told not mention the name of the organization. This idea comes from this international NGO. This international NGO funds the expenses of the conferences, their transport and everything they spend.

⁶¹ They have reported about not issuing a passport for a woman without the consent of her husband, or parents for an unmarried woman; they have also reported about wife beating; and of not implementing the one-year maternity leave for women in government offices. This information was obtained in interviewing a PDK member of the Women's Alliance of Political Parties.

⁶² They have made several demonstrations against such practices as the honor killing.

⁶³ This was clearly noticed in looking at their works and achievements.

seminars about the importance of changing the law.⁶⁴

5.2 NGOs Combating Violence Against Women

5.2.1 Building Awareness and Gender Training

My informants have stated that the general aim behind awareness campaigns is to challenge people's beliefs, behaviors, discourses, customs and to give them alternatives. In the end, this will create lobbying and public pressure on government. One of the informants said: "We want to make the eradication of violence against women very important to everyone. We need an urgent solution, and the intervention must come from everyone". To assist in this process, they show short films, hand out brochures, and make protests and petitions, and produce TV and radio programs. Women's NGOs have their own radio station, and disseminate awareness campaigns on women's issues. The radio is an appropriate tool, since Kurdish scholars' research has shown a high rate of violence against women among rural and uneducated people, and radio can reach places that have less access to other media. In addition, the organizations issue newsletters and magazines.

The Norwegian People's Aid organizes programs for men and women to be gender-equality trainers, who then educate new trainees. Anderson has stated that "gender-equality training can be defined as the expansion or consolidation of technical skills to put knowledge into practice" (Anderson 1991 cited in Mukhopadhyay and Wong 2007: 16). The training provides the community with mediators in the area of women's rights, women's back position, legal awareness of women's rights, providing victims with lawyers, and protection. During my interview, one NGO had a proposal for government to require couples to have seven days of training before they get married. After the training, they could decide whether they really wanted to marry. This can also prepare them for marital life. These training programs are successful because they cover a variety of fields and address both men and women. One example is the mobile team of NGOs that goes to rural areas to do gender-equality training. Another example is the women-empowerment organization that trains clergymen with the cooperation of the Kurdistan Religious Affairs office, where they learn about human rights and the Internet.

⁶⁴ This information was obtained by looking at their documents and interviewing Vian Silvany, of the KRG parliament.

The women NGOs in Kurdistan take Paulo Freire's approach of "education for liberation" when they emphasize seminars, workshops and fighting-illiteracy campaigns. In Freire's opinion, people teach themselves through dialogues with each other. Trainers act as facilitators rather than teachers (Freire 1993). I have found that in these workshops, participants are encouraged to contribute and to discuss issues at length. The trainers try to develop critical consciousness with the participants regarding violence against women, and the understanding that it is against human rights conventions and the principles of every religion. One informant said: "We need to change common sense, to challenge what people take for granted, and how they think they can change it". Scholar emphasized that the best place to start when changing people's mentality is at school. Therefore, they try to change the curricula in primary schools. They have also introduced human rights syllabi in the primary school programs. My informant stated that men and women had enough teaching about human rights and further action is needed, such as understanding those rights and incorporating that understanding into people's mind-set. This requires time and effort.⁶⁵

5.2.2 Research as a Strategy in Ending Violence Against Women

There is general agreement among my informants that stopping violence against women has a high priority, but they need to prove it. The government has put their hands on statistics, and according to my informants, lack of information about the statistics and insufficient data on the subject make their claims doubtful to the people. The police have gathered data through cases reported to them. It is obvious that these numbers can be fabricated to the government's benefit, and the inaccurate statistics have been proven wrong and are criticized by women NGOs.⁶⁶ Anyhow, the level of reporting of violence against women cases is very low. Violence against women is considered a private matter and is invisible. Women fear to report it because of the consequences of reprisals; men do not admit it, and police do not always record it.⁶⁷ Women's NGOs have realized the importance of documenting and researching the incidents accurately. Most independent NGOs have opened a separate section of research in their organization. These

⁶⁵ This statement also has been mentioned by David Pollock of The Washington Institute for New East Policy. In *The Kurdish Globe* (2008a), English-language weekly newspaper issued in Erbil. No. 178, p. 14, date 09/10/2008.

⁶⁶ Article written by gender-equality trainer Triva Dosky with some examples in *Evro*, weekly newspaper issued in Dohuk. No. 245, p. 10, date 2/7/2008.

⁶⁷ Women are afraid of losing their children, getting divorced, and they are dependant economically on men.

NGOs have provided valuable data on the extent of violence, the type of violence, and the causes of violence.

5.2.3 Provider of Shelters and Counseling Services

Women's NGOs provide women who are threatened with physical violence with shelters and mediate between perpetrators and victims, but my informants point to the lack of support from the government and the community. There are not adequate shelters provided by the government, and they can only be found in big cities. The shelters that are available are in critical conditions. They consist of small houses with two or three bedrooms, with often more than ten women on average sharing the house. The women that live in these houses are prostitutes, pregnant women, women with children, women dealing with marital betrayal, and women having problems with their families.

A major challenge that faces a shelter provider is hostile responses from the community and the victim's husband and their families.⁶⁸ Another challenge, especially with cases related to dishonoring the families, is that there is no guarantee a woman will be safe when the case is resolved.⁶⁹ In addition, victims have no idea when their case will be resolved, and what outcome they are waiting for.⁷⁰ Moreover, there is no guarantee that the law that requires men, in case of divorce, to pay alimony to women will be upheld. Women's NGOs also provide women victims with legal advice and training courses such as computer courses, how to write and read, and manual courses such as sewing while they are waiting for their case to be resolved.

5.3 Government's Activities in Combating Violence Against Women

Whereas local and international NGOs do an important job in ending violence against women in Kurdistan, their efforts can only reach a sustainable result if they are supported by the government and the modification of laws. In the following, I take a look at the government's activities in combating violence against women. One important issue is the political

⁶⁸ All the informants of the shelter provider stated that they have been humiliated, insulted, and threatened. For example, the Asuda shelter came under attack on 11 May 2008. See more information about the attack at <http://www.asuda.org/>.

⁶⁹ There were general agreements among the informants, and even with women working with government, that there are a lot of cases that have been resolved, and afterwards, the women have been killed after they went to their homes.

⁷⁰ For more information about such cases see *The Kurdish Globe* (2008c), weekly newspaper issued in Erbil, No. 141, p. 6, 01/09/2008.

representation of women and the importance of quota, alternatively its imposition.⁷¹ The government's activities in combating violence against women include the revision of laws, police directories to trace reports of violence against women, and mass media and advocacy campaigns. Moreover, the prime minister has declared that the government will recruit more female in police to help eliminate violence against women.⁷² The revision of laws is very important for women's NGOs as the laws legitimize their work and give them extra opportunities.⁷³ The government has founded police directories specifically for tackling violence against women in every province in Kurdistan. They record cases of violence and intervene in cases of private violence. My informants stated that they collaborate with the police. The women's NGOs contact the police directories to trace violence against women when they find a woman in danger, or when a perpetrator of violence against women does not show up for a mediation session.

Mass media, TV and radio are controlled by the political ruling parties, other political parties, and the government. Women's NGOs work much harder now than five years ago and have managed to some extent to change people's picture about women. Their speech, work, and activities give a different picture from previous stereotypes, and this has put the general media in an embarrassing situation when not cooperating. Therefore, the media recently have undertaken a number of advocacy activities with women's NGOs to gain a good international reputation, and good community support (women's votes). Moreover, recent reports from the police directorate to trace violence against women shows that women reporting complaints has increased after the announcement of the police directorate telephone numbers in the media. According to the report, in 2007 only 250 cases were reported while in 2008 the number was 849.⁷⁴ The government helped women's NGOs organize an international conference on violence against women in Sulaimania in 2006. They celebrated related international and national events such International Day of Stop the Violence Against Women, and organized the commemoration of some women who were brutally killed. In 2009 the international campaigns to stop violence against women lasted one week. In 2008 it was only one day. Next year the plans are to make it one month.

Local women's NGOs have also criticized the government for not doing enough to help

⁷¹ For more information about the reliability of state in promoting women's rights and ending violence see Bindk, Wail Anower 2005 *Almara wa altifl wa hikok alinsan* (the woman, the children and human rights). Dar alfikr for publication, Eskandaruna. Egypt.

⁷² *The Kurdish Globe* (2008d), weekly newspaper issued in Erbil. No. 185, 27/11/2008.

⁷³ See the government amendment laws in Appendix II.

⁷⁴ *Awena*, newspaper issued in Erbil. No. 146, p. 2, 4/11/2008.

them to use the press and media for their benefit. For instance, a woman journalist stated that she has to get permission from certain places to be able to ask about a case in the court or to question police. Similarly, the men journalists have shared the same point of view, as they find it difficult to even write three lines freely about an incident without thinking carefully what trouble he might get into. They have to be careful not to mention the name of the perpetrator, and where the incident took place. If he or she does so, the journalist will have threats from tribe leader and from family of the perpetrator.

5.3.1 The Political Representation of Women and the Quota Issue

Many scholars have suggested that the representation of women in policy-making will change the practice and the nature of the policies (Lovenduski 2005, Philip 1995). Kurdistan is eager to build new democratic systems, on the basis that will facilitate Kurdistan policy in reconstructing the society and will lead to further improvement. Moreover, Kurdistan has the strong tribal cultural male domination which does not give space to women, and there are clear sign of corruption.⁷⁵ Therefore, a quota can be a useful tool in breaking the systems and reserving seats for women in the legislature. It is worth noting that the imposition of a quota has major consequences on government response and on government structure itself. International empirical evidence has shown that women have made significant changes only after the imposition of quota (Henig and Henig 2001).⁷⁶ Social scientist such as Dahlerup and others have argued that women can make a difference, but only if they are represented in sufficient number (critical mass) perhaps 30–40% (Dahlerup 2006). In Kurdistan women representation reached 27%, but the persistent pressure from local NGOs, the changing tendency of MPs from radical to democratic, and the pressure from international NGOs may gradually remove the obstacles for women's representation in politics. Thus, in 2009 the Iraq's Kurdistan Parliament has increased the quota of women to 30%.

⁷⁵ This can be noticed as till now, there are no women presented in the politburo of the two ruling parties in Kurdistan PDK and PUK. Moreover, Iraqi Kurdistan is constituted of three provinces with nearly four million inhabitants; there are two government with forty-three ministers in the KRG in Erbil.

⁷⁶ My women informants in the parliament stated that the existence of a quota has led some MPs to alter their mainstreaming, traditional- cultural stance toward the more tolerant democratic trend that favors empowering women. This can be noticed from their opposition for changing the laws.

5.4 How to Gain Political Influence

In order to gain political influence, women's NGOs plan to organize gatherings for women once in every month in the garden of the governorate committee. The gatherings are for every woman to discuss women's issues at length. They exhibit short films about violence against women once in a while. They have put enquiry boxes in every girls' secondary and high school, so the girls can give their comments, and tell if they confront any violation of their rights. Every two weeks the women's NGOs come and open these boxes, and try to deal with their enquiries. They organize debates on the radio, trying to challenge public opinion about the behaviour and language discourse of people committing violence against women. This practice resembles what Mansbridge called "street theory".⁷⁷ Women's NGOs try to make good relationships with the community, presenting themselves as intermediaries, and they pass people's comments to the government.

The women's NGOs know that in order to be more effective in influencing government response, they need to be closer to the policy makers. The international NGOs have taught local NGOs how to campaign, how to lobby, how to make proposals and reports, and how to defend women's rights and lead an organization. The communication between local women's NGOs and policy makers have become more objective and fruitful. Women's Protection Rights Committee (WPRC) can report their proposals to the parliament president and other parliament members to have a meeting to express their points of view. The WPRC plays an important role when the agencies want to channel their ideas into government policy. Usually, they pass their ideas to their political parties, too. The political parties will check whether the ideas can be incorporated into the policy of political party's agenda.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the women's NGOs build alliances and make strategies for change. They work as channels to influence government response, and suggest strong links are important in shaping the future pattern of political change. For example, the variation of women's agencies (secular, Islamic, nationalistic) have increased women's involvement in politics. The result is an increase in women's opportunities to enter into decision-making administrative bodies and to

⁷⁷ Drawing on the famous concept "the personal is the political", street theory provides a down-to-earth approach that is both personal and political for ending the violence that some women experience in their daily lives.

establish women's networks within the government offices and political parties. In addition, there is good collaboration between women policy makers, scholars in women's NGOs, women's NGOs worker, and women activists.

Chapter VI

Challenges to Implementing Societal Change

“Interpretation is the only game in town.” (Fish in Hirschmann 2003: 80)

6.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses challenges to the implementation of societal change. I discuss the misinterpretations of religious texts in justifying violence against women, the problem with weak government status, and the impunity in punishing the perpetrators. I also address internal challenges to women’s NGOs, such as following traditional dress codes, critical evaluation of their work, and the lack of recourses.

6.1 The Impact of Misunderstanding of Religion

The theologians and the social scientists of the 21st century have started realizing that misunderstanding religion can be a stumbling block in ending violence against women. Shaheed stated that the laws that restrict women’s autonomy are not Islamic in origin. Moreover, these laws differ between countries and regions (Shaheed in Hirschman 2003: 196). For example, female genital mutilation is a well-known practice in Erbil and Sulaimania province, while it is unknown in Dohuk. Theologians dispute the interpretation of some verses of the Quran and the sayings, *hadith*, of the Prophet. There are different types of *hadith*: authentic (*sahih*), which is correct and unquestionable; weak (*daiif*), which has weakness in its chain or in the text; and fabricated (*mawdui*), which is undoubtedly a fabrication. To avoid misinterpretations, one has to either recall all the Prophet’s *hadiths* or to check the authenticity in the six books.⁷⁸ Badawi has suggested that one has to consider certain things in interpreting verses of Quran, such as looking at whether there are any Prophet sayings about the interpretation of the specific verses, the causes of the descent of the verses, whether the verses can be applied in all occasions, or if they only apply in a special event, and one should look also to the text as a whole (Badawi 1995).

There are four traditional legal schools of thought in Sunni Islamic law; Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali, and Maliki. People can benefit from this variation of schools. For example, the Hanafi

⁷⁸ The six books are Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Sunan Abi Da’ud, Sunan al-Tirmidhi, Sunan al-Sughra, Sunan Ibn Maja.

school allows an adult woman to contract her own marriage, while according to the Shafi school every woman must have the consent and cooperation of her father or guardian (*wali*) in order to contract a marriage (Coulson 1964 cited in White 1978: 54). Moreover, the Malki school is more tolerant in adopting innovative methods of interpretations, such as *al-masalih al-mursalah*, consideration of public interest. Such concepts make Islamic laws adaptable to the society's needs (El Hajjami 2009). Thus, interpretations of religion depend on interacting with societal frames.

People often mix cultural tradition with religion to legitimize violence. The Sharia gives the guardianship power to men over their family and women. Cultural traditions may intervene to extend this guardianship to the whole family circle and tribe.

In Kurdistan, people follow only the Shafi school of thought. Most sources about religion are in the Arabic language, which is not the mother language of the people. In addition, there is a high rate of illiteracy, especially among women. The misunderstanding of religion is not linked to Kurds alone; it is a universal phenomenon of mixing religion with traditional practices; wife beating which is common in Kurdistan may include nose or tongue cutting, breaking or dislocating of bones, and other injuries to the body.⁷⁹ In doing so, men believe that they are administering God's law and justify the violence by religious discourse. Based on a survey conducted by the Political Institute in Dohuk, asking when men should be allowed to use physical violence against women, 6.19% stated that men should be allowed to use violence when women become indifferent, 14.4% said when an accusation has been made for a third time, and 22% held violence to be legitimate when connected to honor. About 31.2% said men never have the right to use violence.⁸⁰ People base their opinions on the misinterpretation of the Quran verse:

“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more strength than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient and guard in the husband's absence what Allah would have them to guard. As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance); for Allah is most High and Great (above you all). If you fear a breach between them twain, appoint (two) arbiters, one from his family and the other from hers. If they

⁷⁹ The women's NGOs have mentioned a lot of sad stories and brutal torture such as using pliers in extracting the flesh of women.

⁸⁰ Dohuk Institute for Political Issues (DIPI) survey, they have distributed 250 questionnaires to employees working in governmental and religion offices in Dohuk in 2007.

wish for peace, Allah will cause their reconciliation; for Allah has full knowledge and is acquainted with all things.” (An-Nisa’ ch. 4:34–35).

The Prophet Muhammad has explained that beating is a symbolic act, when stating *dharban ghayra mubarrih*, “a light tap which leaves no mark.” There is also consensus among scholars that beating should be no more than a light touch by *siwak*, a toothbrush.⁸¹ In other Quran verses, the husband is ordered to treat his wife kindly, such as in verses 4:19 and 30:21, which condemn violence between spouses, and describe the marital relation as tranquil, merciful and affectionate. The relationship should be based on companionship, not service or tyranny. The Prophet never used violence against any female and emphasized the importance of good treatment of women. He is reported to have said, “I commend you to be kind to women,”⁸² and “the best of you is the best to his family (wife).”⁸³ He also said “How does anyone of you beat his wife as he beats the stallion camel and then he may embrace (sleep with) her?”⁸⁴ My clergy male informants agreed with the above statements, and I found no authentic hadith recommending physical violence. However, it is difficult to end beating against women since it is done with reference to religion. Therefore, it will take time and effort in until people understand the correct interpretation.

In Kurdistan, only in extreme cases of physical violence is the perpetrator punished. Humiliation, psychological violence, and threatening a woman with divorcing or verbal abuse is prevalent in the society and is not considered violence. However, Riffat Hassan has argued that “God who speaks through Quran is characterized by justice and ... can never be guilty of *zulm* (unfairness, tyranny, oppression or wrongdoing). Hence the Quran, as God’s word cannot be made the source of human injustice”(Hassan 1995:12).

Islamic principles criminalize the act of honor killing. The perpetrator of violence against women supports honor killing stating it is important for the society’s honor that men take their responsibility. According to the last survey made by the DIPI, 44.6% of those asked said that

⁸¹ Dr. Muzammil H. Siddiqi, former President of the Islamic Society of North America, commented on this issue in date of access 20/12/2008 http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503544256. For more information also look at “Gender Equity in Islam” by J. Badawi, professor at Saint Mary’s University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, and a cross-appointed faculty member in the Departments of Religious Studies and Management. It is available electronically <http://www.jannah.org/genderequity/equitynotes.html#note14>.

⁸² Matn Al-Bukhari, Dar Ihya’ Al Kutub Al-Arabiyyah, Cairo, Egypt, n.d., Vol. 3, p. 257.

⁸³ Riyadh Al-Saliheen, (Al-Nawawi, Compiler) Nizamuddin, New Delhi, India, n.d., p. 140.

⁸⁴ Sahih Al-Bukhari, op.cit., Vol. 8, hadith 68, pp. 42–43.

women should be killed in cases of accusations of adultery (*zina*).⁸⁵ Hence, it is common that a woman may get killed if she marries a man that her family does not want, if she refuses to marry the man that the family wants her to marry, or if the woman has premarital sexual relations. However, many girls get killed while they are virgins, and the family knows this after their death.⁸⁶ The KRG has criminalized honor killings and treat them as murder.⁸⁷ Islam does not allow premarital sexual relationships, but there are clear explanations in the Quran and Hadith that demand evidence and confession in cases of *zina* (sexual intercourse outside the legal relationship). If *zina* is proven, both the male and female get punished. In Kurdistan, only the woman is punished. One problem is that the cause that may lead to honor killing in Kurdistan is not Islamic. For example, in Islam the woman has the right to accept or refuse the marriage proposal based on authentic *hadith* from the prophet:

“Ibn Abbas reported that a girl came to the Messenger of Allah, and she reported that her father had forced her to marry without her consent. The Messenger of God gave her the choice ... (between accepting the marriage or invalidating it, the girl said: ‘Actually, I accept this marriage, but I wanted to let women know that parents have no right to force a husband on them.’”⁸⁸

In Kurdistan, the most recent survey showed that only 70% of the people agreed that the women should have the right to choose their spouses.⁸⁹ It is worth noting that most of the honor killings and cases of women committing suicide in the present day in Kurdistan are because of enforced marriage or prevented marriage. As a result, the KRG has defined this as being against the law. Moreover, according to many Islamic theologians no authentic *Hadith* or *Quranic* verse recommends female genital mutilation (Badawi 1995, Muntaser 2007).⁹⁰

To conclude, Sharia is a living condition. Change can be made without altering the sacred text, but with better understanding of the text. This led many scholars to change their pessimistic

⁸⁵ Dohuk Institute for Political issues.

⁸⁶ Amnesty Sweden <http://ww2.amnesty.se/krq.nsf>, accessed 13/07/2008. In Asuda report of 2006 it is stated that almost half of the honor-killed women were virgins. Look at Asuda annual report of 2006, p. 7, <http://www.asuda.org/>.

⁸⁷ See the definition of the law in the Appendix.

⁸⁸ Ibn Majah (compiler), Sunan Ibn Majah, Dar Ihya' Al Kutub Al-Arabiyyah, Cairo, Egypt, 1952, vol.1, hadith 1873.

⁸⁹ The prime minister has stated this in *The Kurdish Globe*, weekly English-language newspaper, No. 185, Thursday, 27 November 2008, accessed 20/12/2008, <http://www.kurdishglobe.net/servlet/WritePDFServlet?ID=158>.

⁹⁰ The KRG has banned female-genital mutilation.

point of view of realizing women's rights in Islamic countries to more positive in the 1990s(Mir-Hosseini 2000:1-7).

6.2 Weak Government and the Enforcement of the Law

According to Fukuyama, "weak states or failed states are the source of the world's most serious problems" (Fukuyama 2004: XI). Unless Iraq and Kurdistan gain stability and can coexist, it will be difficult to further improve the situation of women. As it is now, the Kurdish government is very busy in Baghdad trying in resolving the contested issues and do not have time to give importance to internal issues. Other issues related to the stability are the maintaining of the Iraq borders from the infiltration of different ideologies, and people who want instability for the region.

Women's NGOs have criticized the Kurdish government for reformulating laws but not punishing the perpetrators. These accusations are supported by research (see for example Shwan 2007) and my informants. Punishing perpetrators could stop or reduce men from committing violence, or make them think twice about the consequences before committing violence. Although punishing perpetrators may prevent violence, the government has amended laws forbidding the physical violence; but the implementation of the laws is not working according to local women's NGOs perspectives. According to my informants, the courts sometimes treat cases of violence against women on the basis of Iraq's previous laws, such as the provocation of honor killing, which mitigate the sentence of women killing. However, it seems that the government and local women's NGOs have made steps in resolving this pitfall. For example, the Global Justice Center in the United States, in cooperation with Kurdish NGOs, has offered legal training for judges to "enhance the rights of women through the alignment of local laws with the international standards".⁹¹ In addition, the government has employed and encouraged more women to become judges, and the Women's Alliance of Political Parties makes consistent visits to check about the implementation of new laws.

The situation seems a lot better now than in the previous year. The threat about punishment is now real, especially in cases of honor killing and extreme cases of physical violence. However, for other cases such as wife beating, punishment might not fulfill the purpose

⁹¹ For more information on this training see KRG web page, accessed 24/12/2008, <http://www.krg.org/articles/detail.asp?smap=02010100&lngnr=12&asnr=&anr=21690&rnr=223>.

yet. Based on my interviewees there are several reasons related to this. For example, because punishment is not yet implemented, not many women file complaints against their perpetrator. Women are usually afraid of reporting the complaint because of the intimidation from the perpetrators. Moreover, as many of my informants mentioned, punishing the perpetrator by imprisonment may lead to severe consequences to women, since men usually are the breadwinners. Hence, many women bear the consequences of violence. It is therefore good that the government offers surviving guarantee for women seeking their rights.

When a case of physical violence is reported to the police, usually the police officer will encourage the victim to revoke the case and make a compromise action. One reason is that the majority of women and men still believe it is husband's right to beat his wife. Another challenge is the law amendment concerning wife beating is not yet practiced everywhere. According to my informants, the law has not been amended in Sulaimania but is practiced in Erbil and Dohuk. There is also confusion in the law procedure, where there is no differentiation between a light strike and serious physical violence. Both cases are to be dealt with by the same procedure. There is also the social-cultural aspect related to the issue, as women do not get any support even by her close family nor by the community when seeking justice. I was made aware by my informant that:

“Whenever a woman makes a complaint against her husband to the police, and people know about it, the man will think that he does not have pride any more, that the wife's complaint to the police dishonors him, so the minimum he is going to do is divorce her to get his pride and honor back.”

Another issue that local women NGOs are complaining about is the local community's organization. Local communities are usually headed by tribe leaders who resolve disputes between people through counseling and mediation processes. According to my informants, these leaders usually deprive women of their rights. They prevent cases from being dealt with by the court by resolving the cases inside the community and mediating between the family of victim and the perpetrator. A woman activist stated that she witnessed a case of women killing that was dealt with by these tribal organizations without referring them to the court. Usually, the families will agree without giving much attention to the rights of woman that has been killed. However,

during my interviews I was made aware by my informant that the government has issued some orders to those organizations not to deal with women's issues.

6.3 Challenges Facing Local Women's NGOs

In a society like Kurdistan, the appearance of a woman is very important. Women's NGOs have a reputation for leading women astray and spreading immorality. Their work is directly involved with community members, and the question is, how successful can their work be without sharing values with the community? I have found that modest dressing may be important for two reasons. First, there is an accepted dress code of modesty in the society. Dressing in tight jeans and Westernized items may offend men as they see women challenging the traditional values (Islamic) of their community. This was also stated by my male religious informants. They suggested women's NGOs once made a demonstration in front of the building of the Islamic religious affairs to ban the (*Abaya*) chador.⁹² Secondly, having only women's presence in NGOs challenges men's belief. Not applying to the local dress code can increase men's "hostility". Failing to do so may also lead some women to share their male counterparts' assumption that women's NGOs spread immorality in the society. This will make the NGOs objectives of ending the violence undoable.

I have, however, found some structural problems within the NGOs that also can prevent the improvement of the situation of women. Local women's NGOs are only a little bit better than men in terms of hierarchical, bureaucratic systems. Sometimes an office worker may find it difficult to raise an urgent issue directly to the head of the organization, or may not find it easy to share their ideas with the other staff members. For example, if an issue is raised by some staff members, it is decided by the head office without much discussion. In other words, issue of power (male patriarchy) sneaks into their debate.

This problem is related to another problem, the lack of self-evaluation of their program. I have found that their work has not been critically analyzed to learn from previous mistakes. Instead, they continue the same routine procedure. One of the lessons that can be learned is to be able to mention the pitfalls of the organization, and to be self-critical of its own organization.

⁹² An *abaya* is Kurdish black cloth women's wear. It covers from the head to the whole body, but not the face, and now there are different fashions coming from Arabic states; some of them are very transparent.

Another obstacle in the NGOs is the lack of feedback and advice from implemented programs, whether the expertise is secular or religious. The lack of cooperation and enmities between the religious people and women's NGOs is hindering their success, although there are a lot of similarities between what women's NGOs are striving for and what clergies are claiming. Though collaboration, discussion, and opportunities to listen to each other, they may reach some compromises. In addition, the local NGOs lack supervision and evaluation from donor organizations. I found and heard from my informants that the international NGOs (the American NGOs) only require some photos and a report about the program they support, but do not give any feedback. The American NGOs spent a lot of money on the workshops and seminars. Typically, they hold these in luxurious hotels, providing good food for the participants, but without much attention to the contents of the seminar. I found that themes were repeated in their seminars, and they were not well organized. The lecturer claimed not to have statistics about violence against women in Kurdistan. I encountered the same difficulty. Therefore, I propose that the universities should have a special department for statistics. Moreover, asking help from scholars to evaluate them and give feedback would be helpful. The local NGOs could also suggest opening women's studies programs at the universities and asking the government and international NGOs to bring expertise from abroad to conduct research.

While there are many donors interested in supporting local NGOs, many want to support a program which is considered good in the perception of the donor. There is, however, often a lack of continuity in programs and staff training. So, when a local NGO gets funding for a program, they may find it difficult to find experts to do the project.

Local women's NGOs give priority to women's awareness programs. This is very important, but when most participants are female, women will know about their rights while men do not. NGOs should address both men and women. It may, however, be difficult to find men who will participate in the program. I believe that this can be solved by making workshops in school halls or universities, and letting it be announced by the media not by women's NGOs, as men often have doubts about their work.

6.4 Reflections on Solutions to the Demands of Women's NGOs

“Only the battered women themselves know in detail what will help them to be safe. If we fail to listen, we might fail to be of help” (Hague, Mullender, Aris 2003: 3).

The first demand of women's organizations is to reformulate the personal status laws. For Kabeer, planning for transformation involves strategic-thinking planning of what is possible (Kabeer 1992). Improving women's status in Kurdistan is dependent upon many factors. Despite the fact that Kurds have semi-autonomous status, their independence is not guaranteed. For example, in 2005 the United States supported the Turkish invasion in Kurdistan, and it is known that neighboring countries do not want that Kurds to gain status (Bjdary in Aziz 2006:71).⁹³

Moreover, administrative corruption is persistent in Kurdistan. Also, the government is unable to solve basic needs, such as electricity and clean water, and there is a shortage of fuel. This situation has created an atmosphere of hopelessness and helplessness. If the government demands cultural changes from the people, it might make the situation worse for the government. The men may see women and the family as the only aspect that they can control.

However, to improve the situation of women, it is necessary to change the attitudes and the laws of the society. One challenge is the common belief among people that religious practices and beliefs of every day should not be touched. People imitate without knowing why, only because they repeat what they have been doing since they were born. And as I mentioned earlier, many practices of everyday life are based on the wrong interpretation of religion. Similarly, if the legal, social, political, judicial, cultural, and international human rights principles remain untouched, the violence and the road to violence will not be uprooted. However, changing the laws will increase the opportunity for and give more space to transform the situation.

It is correct to say, however, that the government thinks carefully about realizing women's demands. For example, it is well known to everyone that the government is favoring women to men in getting government-office work. This has led many men to believe in women's capabilities, and has changed their perception about women. However, many women's NGOs

⁹³ He also stated in his book that the delegate from Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq were meeting each other every three months to discuss how to make Kurdistan unstable.

criticize the government for not doing enough in supporting their aims. But the government cannot be blamed for every misfortune women have. So, the government may find itself in a difficult and conflicting situation. Sometimes the solution adopted by the government and supported by women's NGOs is against human rights principles. For example, in case where a woman is raped, the law states that the minimum penalty is five years imprisonment. The perpetrator can also be executed by hanging, if the rape was done by force, or the victim was a "taboo relative" of the criminal. But the law also says that the perpetrator can be freed if he marries the victim and stays in the marriage for three years before divorcing the victim (Harikar NGO 2008). In this case, the law itself becomes a violation of women's rights, suggesting a rapist should marry his victim. Violence is solved by violence. However, some may argue that the government may find no other alternative, since otherwise it is very likely that the woman will get killed by her family. Binding the marriage for three years may, however, seem unreasonable. If the rapist divorces the victim after three years he will be free, and what about the victim's right afterwards? To some extent this is provocative law which can encourage men to rape women as they like and then marrying them for three years and divorcing them afterwards.

Women's NGOs and the government engage consistently in critical debates. The women's NGOs blame the government for not providing enough shelters for women. One informant in Sulaimania stated that they are in urgent need of shelters because the area is less conservative than Erbil and Dohuk, and women's organizations are more active and more victims are reported. My informants also want the government and the international NGOs to build large, sophisticated shelters for women with sport and entertainment facilities. Today the only entertainment they have is the TV. For safety reasons, their mobiles are taken away from them, they change their names, and it is preferred that they not to tell their stories to any other victims in the shelter. The issue of safety was also mentioned by my informant Zakia, who is a member of KDP and has sixteen years experience as the head of Kurdistan women's union.

"Since the opening of the shelter and till now, we cannot advertise the name of shelter. And till now we cannot announce through the media that any woman who has experienced physical

violence can contact the protection center, and that women can complain against the perpetrator.”⁹⁴

This informant also stated that *“when the government first opened the directory for violence against women, they had a lot of criticism in the community. This has obliged the government to change its name to ‘police directorate to trace violence against women’”*.

Also, the women working in the organizations and the shelter have to think about their security. I noticed this when I was interviewing them. They were concerned not to mention their names in my thesis, as they wanted their work to be secret. It is important that the government considers the risks involved for women working in the field, but one may blame the government for not providing protection for the local women’s NGOs. For example, the Asuda shelter was raided on 12 May 2008.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the causes that make women’s organizations struggle to speed up their work and improve their strategies. For example, people use the misinterpretation of sacred text to justify physical violence. They also use religion to silence victims, defame or incite hatred against those who are willing to offer alternative interpretations of those texts to protect women. I have identified internal factors that contribute to women’s NGOs structure and struggles. I suggest that for women’s NGOs to have a real effect in reducing violence and changing the social structure, it is important for them to consider how the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of individual men and women can be relearned and replaced by egalitarian attitudes and beliefs. This can be achieved through dialogue based on tolerance and by giving one another space to express their views. It is also suggested that women’s NGOs development and crafting needs to be seen as a twin process. This can be useful to women’s NGOs in understanding their experiences, and in developing strategic plans to make their organization work efficiently. This means to use “conscientization” in criticizing their organization’s work, and how to make it better, not just following the same routine over and over again.

⁹⁴ All the shelters have different names; for example, the shelter in Dohuk is called the Women’s Rehabilitation Centre. This is founded by Diakonia, the Swedish international NGO and is now run by the government.

Chapter VII

Solutions to Implementing Societal Change

“Great oaks from little acorns grow.” (proverb)

7.0 Introduction

This chapter draws some of the threads of this paper together by identifying and analyzing women’s NGOs aims and activities, and exploring some of the strains and challenges for change. I ask whether the structure of the Kurdish society can be changed by the assistance of women’s organizations. I draw a connection between women’s NGOs work and their environment in relation to social-scientist theories of Foucault, Bourdieu, Kabeer, and Friedmann.

7.1 Reconstructing Gender Relation

How can women’s NGOs change the structure of the Kurdish society? The studies of Foucault and Bourdieu can give us some useful insight for better analyzing women’s organizations as a source of transforming the current situation in Kurdistan. It can help us identify that the current situation of women is not bleakly pessimistic, but that there is reason to be optimistic. This can be identified through the lenses of structuralist and subjectivist point of views.⁹⁵ Many social scientists have supported Foucault on emphasizing knowledge as a source of power and the important role of discourses in the social construction of society. Women’s NGOs emphasize educating women because of the high rate of illiteracy among women which make women believe in anything said by their husbands and tribe leaders. Moreover, women’s NGOs have increased their campaigns in empowering women with knowledge through seminars. They give lectures on women’s rights in the international conventions that Iraq has ratified, such as the CEDAW convention. Moreover, people have access to the Internet, and there are an increasing number of women entering universities. These factors have led women to attain what Paulo Freire referred to as “conscientization”, that is, women are becoming aware of injustices in their lives, and are developing a critical consciousness about the structure of their society. Thus Kurdish women put more effort in seeking change, and more women have joined them. It has led

⁹⁵ The structuralist point of view describes the women’s agency situation before the 2003. Subjectivist thought describes women’s agency after the invasion.

some to commit self-immolation as a message of protesting against the injustice.

Levi-Strauss stated that language creates an environment in which we communicate and express ourselves. We follow these embedded rules unconsciously and consciously, and our actions and thoughts are restricted by the limits of language (Levi-Strauss 1984).⁹⁶ Levi-Strauss also emphasized the role of myth: “I therefore claim to show not how men think in myths, but how myths operate in men’s minds without their being aware of the fact” (Lévi-Strauss 1969:12). Many myths and discourses found in Kurdish tradition and folklore affect women and contribute to the marginalization of women. For example, 1) “A woman is a woman even if she extracts lion’s ears.” This means that a woman would never be equal to a man, even if she did the impossible. 2) “A thousand women equal one man.” 3) “The one who lies is the woman not the man.” This means that every bad thing comes from women (Rasoul 1997). Although some laws were amended after 2001, these laws were not implemented, and women also lacked awareness of those rights. Moreover, women eventually realized that changing the law would have few consequences without also changing social tradition and institutions. In tackling these issues the international NGO NPA, with the help of the government, introduced the human rights syllabus into the education systems. Furthermore, at the time of my fieldwork, they were working to change the primary school syllabus pictures and phrases that naturalize women’s exclusion by showing such things as girls doing housework in helping their mothers inside, while boys are shown working outside helping their fathers.

Foucault has been influenced by the structuralist school in emphasizing the role of discourse when it comes to framing human thoughts. This school was opposed by the subjectivist school. According to their view, human beings have different experiences. The social context of life is based upon multiple experiences. A society thus constitutes of a diversity of people having different abilities and thoughts, through which people can benefit from each other. Therefore, the human being is able to make changes. Foucault has also changed his position, stating that discourse may change through the history (Foucault 1984:81). Further he suggested that knowledge and power are the causes of changing the structure of the society. Thus, changes in the structures of society are possible by developing alternative discourses. In Iraq, the political regime change and the U.S. invasion have been the leading causes in the change of discourses.

⁹⁶ For further information on structuralist ideas, see Neil J. Smelser, 1988. “Social Structure” in *Handbook of Sociology*, edited by Neil J. Smelser. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage. And Anthony Giddens, 1984. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bourdieu has developed the argument in his theory of practice, describing how human action in everyday practice creates discourses and structures. In Kurdish everyday discourse and practice, a woman should not speak her mind, even though she might be right. Moreover, she should not work outside the home, even when her contribution is needed. Because of these social structures, many women prefer not to inquire about anything, even when it concerns them, and they prefer not to speak with men even when they have a good reason. Bourdieu's ideas focus on the relationship between structure and agency. He stated that the structure guides human action, but human behaviour can also change the structure. As a result, the relationship between structure and agency is dynamic, and none of them can be independent of the other (Bourdieu 1977:3). His theory indicates that social structures are embedded in society through everyday events and these can be changed. In Kurdistan, for example, women are favored to men in getting government agencies' jobs. So, the economically difficult situation has led men to accept women working in order to help them provide the basic needs for the family, and the women have proven their success in working outside. For instance, the more recent surveys conducted by DIPI showed that 83.7% of men are in favor of women working outside the home.⁹⁷ Those events can be studied through the observation of the actor engaged in everyday events (Bourdieu in Harker, Mahar, and Wilkes 1990:8). Eventually, human behaviour (practices) can reproduce new structures. The women's NGOs in Iraqi Kurdistan try to create awareness about some of the habits women themselves follow; for example, that a women asking for an inheritance is shameful. In this context, women's organizations consider themselves as role models for others to follow.

Bourdieu uses the term "habitus" to describe and analyze the orientation which guides our behaviour. The social structures are thus informed by habitus (Bourdieu 1977:72). Our social interaction is invertible and subject to improvisation and change over time. Thus, the habitus of the individual can be transmitted to social classes, in the context of social groups, which eventually change and inform the habitus of the entire community. Another concept used by Bourdieu is "capital". Capital is defined as the "the ability to exercise control over one's own future and that of others" and contribute to change the structure of a social group (Calhoun, Lipuma and Postone 1993:4). Capital is a form of power which can be exercised in different

⁹⁷ Dohuk Institute for Political Issues (DIPI) Survey in *Evro* newspaper. No. 216, 28/11/2007.

forms, such as economic capital, nonmaterial capital (symbolic capital), for instance prestige, status, and authority (religious leader, tribe leader, educated people). To Bourdieu, the most powerful capital is the nonmaterial, through which skilled people intervene and determine what is right or wrong for people to exercise (Bourdieu 1977:178–179). In Iraqi Kurdistan, one of the NGOs' aims is to create awareness of the human rights conventions. The KRG has reformulated laws in women's favor; the women's NGOs have their own independent magazines and newspapers. Moreover, they have conducted scientific research about violence. Furthermore, more women have graduated from the police academy and have become police. More women have graduated from the law faculty, which has led to the increased number of women judges in the court. In addition, the government and international NGOs brought experts and scholars from abroad to give training to judges and policemen working in police directories in tracing violence against women.

Changes in women's NGOs works are obvious as they are getting more experience, due to the constant monitoring of giving information and training sponsored by international NGOs. This has led to political changes in women's favor such as the imposition of quotas and a variety of political party ideologies, for example, communist, Islamic, and secular. As the result, more women join political parties, as they are the gatekeepers for women to get high positions in government.

7.2 The Sources of Power and Women's NGOs

On what basis can women's organizations increase their sources of power, enlarge their organizations, and improve their achievements? Women previously believed that the violence would last forever, and there could not be a way out of it. This has led many women to commit self-immolation. Nevertheless, Foucault stated that "no particular social ordering can ever be absolute or eternal. It means there will always be resistance, revolt, struggle against socially imposed constraints, renewed dialogue and the transformation of social forms" (Foucault in Falzon 1998:52). He also confirmed that "no total domination of absolute power over others could ever be achieved" (ibid 1998:51). Then, Foucault has given us useful advice for dealing better with the trapped situation of women by pointing out that the situation requires a "counselor to tell us the truth" (Hirschmann 2003:236). Generally, an outsider perspective is necessary and

helpful as the situations calls for resistance, negotiation, and knowing what to do. In Kurdistan, the role of female outsiders, such as women who entered with the American NGOs, or Kurdish women activists coming from Europe, were very important in helping the local women's organizations in planning and designing their strategies. Scholars agree that women's access to power and control is an important factor in ending discrimination and violence against women, and to enhance women's rights socially and politically (Senerivatne and Curie 2001). For example, women's NGOs provide women with back position of shelters, and offer counseling services and learning opportunities.

Friedmann has emphasized three types of power needed for marginalized women to gain power: 1) Social power which includes: a) Information. For example, women's organizations have developed and changed the tribal thinking of people by providing them alternative discourses for understanding women's rights as human rights. b) Skills. For example, the women's NGOs provide manual learning courses, such as sewing, computer training, and teaching women how to read and write.⁹⁸ c) Knowledge and participation. For example, women's political-aligned organizations help women to be ready to participate in politics by providing them with training. d) Finance. For example, according to civil societies NGOs, it is very easy to get funding from international NGOs for gender-mainstreaming awareness programs. 2) Political power which might include, for example, taking part in decision-making through the quota system. 3) Psychological power, that is, self-awareness and confidence of one's own abilities. The above mentioned sources of power are all interdependent to one another, and one strengthens the other (Friedmann 1992:136–166).

Kabeer (2001) has further identified the concept of gaining power as the ability to make choices. In Kurdistan, a woman may get beaten simply for making a choice, and might get killed simply because she has chosen who she wanted to marry. Some women commit suicide because they see no alternative. Kabeer, however, suggested a strategy for gaining power to make choices in three domains of society: resources, agency, and achievement. She identified the resources to human, material, and social resources which facilitate women in making choices. Resources can be obtained through the relationship between state, market, and community (Kabeer 2001:18–

⁹⁸ As Galtung stated "... the critical point is action based on skills"(Galtung 1996:22). I realized that these activities played an influential role in women's empowerment. For example, sewing training—women wear traditional uniform cloth, and there are no textile factories in Kurdistan. Thus, ready-made traditional women's clothes cannot be found in the market. This obliges women to go to women private tailors as people do not let their women to go men tailors.

22). In Kurdistan, the control over the distribution of resources is in the hands of the KRG, religious and tribal leaders, and heads of the organizations. For example, the KRG made changes in the laws and established police directories to trace violence against women.

The second sphere is agency, which involves meaning, motivation, negotiation, resistance, manipulation, subversion and the ability to share ideas which will give people a sense of agency (ibid 2001). Women's NGOs have the ability to define goals and act upon them. For example, the international NGOs provide local NGOs with plans and strategies. Agency can be exercised on an individual basis such as women activists, and also as part of a group. Friedmann emphasized the collective work of the organization as the best method of getting access to power, since networks strengthen the process of social, political, and psychological relationships (ibid 1992). The international NGOs in Kurdistan have helped women to mobilize and extend their organizations through, for instance, the formation of Alliance of Women's Political Parties (AWPP) in every city in Iraq, and organizing conferences for local women's NGOs.

The last scope is achievement. Kabeer talks about inequality in the capacity to make choices (ibid 1999). In Kurdistan, the lack of adequate shelters and the systematic gender differences hinder women in making choices. Therefore, women's NGOs continue to bargain with the government. They request more shelters to be opened because shelters are so far only found in the big cities. In 2008, they were about to open one shelter in Dohuk city in Zakho district and another one in Dohuk city in Amedia district. In addition, an improved economic situation has given women opportunities to get jobs and become independent.

The challenge with Kabeer's three dimensions—resources, agency, and achievement—as sources for women's empowerment is the relation between power and the benefits of those who make choices (ibid 2001). For instance, some women actively participate in sustaining the subordination of women and contribute to increase violence against women. Women often teach their daughters the regressive cultural tradition habits such as the practice of female genital mutilation. The main point that Kabeer wanted to make in this discussion is that resources and achievement have to be available for women to obtain empowerment.

7.3 The Power of Bargaining

Violence against women in Kurdistan is socially constructed as the result of a long process of

social relationship between women, between men, and between men and women. Giddens claimed that power is dynamic and processing, and that it is highly complex. He refuses to define the individual as completely powerless (Giddens 1984). Other scholars have also emphasized the need to understand gender as a system of social relations (see e.g Goffman 1977). In addition, as Agarwal confirmed gender relations are “not uniform across societies nor historically static” (1994:51). Gender relations in Kurdistan are not monolithic. They have been subject to change through the process of negotiation, cooperation, and conflict between women’s NGOs, the community and the KRG. This means that the relation between the above actors is contextualized, maintained, and transformed through contestation or bargaining according to the actors’ access to social, economic, and political power (ibid 1994).

Therefore, due to constant effort, women’s status has improved despite the high rate of physical violence. Thus, the reciprocal benefit among the women’s NGOs (representatives of women), the government, and the community (religious Imams, tribe leaders representing the community) made them continue attempts to bargain and contest. The development of this dialectical relationship may lead to awareness and consciousness about the experience of women’s violence. It may also spell out differences and similarities in the process of negotiation. I realized during my fieldwork that women’s NGOs did not take part in negotiations with community representatives, such as religious and tribal leaders. Instead leaders have marginalized women and excluded them from negotiations.⁹⁹ The demands of women’s NGOs would have more fruitful results if they were backed by religious imams and tribal leaders. These leaders have the leverage, prestige, and opportunity to change people’s beliefs and attitudes, for example, in the Friday prayer speech. Tribal leaders also have the power to improve women’s conditions when mediating to resolve problems in which women’s rights are involved. Women’s NGO workers have said that they use arguments from religion when mediating between men and women, since the physical violence against women is often based on the misunderstanding of

⁹⁹ This has clearly noticed when attending a seminar sponsored by international NGO RTI and organized by women’s leadership program in 06/07/2008. A lecture was given by the university lecturer and Imam in the mosque Anass. He talked about the violence against women and the use of religion in legitimizing it in Kurdistan. The attendees were women activists, women’s NGOs workers and men fighting to end the violence. The attendees were astonished by the explanation of Hadith, Quran and the interpretation of daily violence and treatment of women according to Islam; they expressed their ignorance about it.

religion.¹⁰⁰

The relationship between women's NGOs and KRG is characterized by cooperation and conflict. The government can be useful as a support for women NGOs. Moreover, it can initiate progressive programs, reformulate laws, and promote programs that favor women's interests. Thus, this can provide a space for individuals and groups to escape and openly contest the backward community practices. Moreover, the government can increase women's participation in its decision-making positions. Along with the women's NGOs they can initiate programs, which are not controversial to the government, such as female literacy programs, building women's capacities, and opening and running women's shelters.¹⁰¹

The KRG also finds itself limited by conflicts between groups and individuals in its decision-making that often have different attitudes towards invoking laws to the benefit of women. For example, the government is dominated by two big tribes, the Barzani and Talabani tribes. Some of their key members in decision-making are against promoting women's rights. It may thus be difficult to enforce laws on their own tribe's people. It is common knowledge that the Barzani tribe does not give their women to men of other tribes and do not marry from other tribes. Furthermore, government decision-makers may meet resistance from other parts of the government apparatus such as the courts and the police. A case of wife beating may be reported to the police, but the police officer may fail to investigate it because he believes it is a husband's right to use violence against his wife. The religious imams may also resist in disseminating progressive new laws.

Scholars have noticed some disadvantage in applying Western feminist theory (cultural relativism) on the study of women's NGOs in Kurdistan. As Bourdieu has emphasized the importance for women's NGOs to know what they are bargaining for at any given time and in a given society; otherwise, some of the bargaining might fall in the domain called *doxa* (Bourdieu 1977:167–170). This means that bargaining has to be accepted as natural, and open for questioning and contestation. In other words, imposing Western feminism in detail at once may not bring success, as this might deprive them of bargaining and negotiation. The example of polygamy can elaborate the argument. The women's NGOs have emphasized banning polygamy,

¹⁰⁰ For scholars who confirm misinterpretations of religion, mixed with culture traditions and legitimization of violence on the basis of religion, see, for example, Ahmed 1992, Shaheed 1994, Stowasser 1994, and Abu-Lughod 1993.

¹⁰¹ A women's shelter worker stated that the government very often brings eminent foreign country representatives to the shelter to ameliorate the Kurdish reputation abroad.

despite the fact that there are clear statements in the Quran verses allow polygamy and the Iraqi constitution of Baghdad have made it clear that no law must contradict the Sharia (Islamic laws).¹⁰² This has been backed up several times and reconfirmed recently by the Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani. Thus, to some extent, the claim to ban polygamy has weakened women's NGOs mobilization and also defames their reputation among religious people and communities. Banning polygamy would affect many women's NGOs workers, as I have found that many women's NGOs workers are second wives. In addition, there are a lot of women widows, and older women want to get married as this is the only chance for them to practice sex. Furthermore, it is in politicians benefit to preserve polygamy, since many want to be able to marry more than one woman. Thus, women's NGOs have to make balances between guaranteeing the funds they get from international NGOs and not demanding things that isolate them from the community.

Doxa in Kurdistan includes accepted practices that favor one group over another. One example is the tradition of the "exchange wife" which is to present a woman as a wife gift to resolve blood feuds. So, it is in the interest of the dominant group to maintain the practices of doxa, while the interest of oppressed group will be repressed. This doxa can, however, be subject to change and challenge. For instance, after persistent challenges, the Kurdish government eventually issued another law making polygamy more difficult (Bourdieu 1977:169). The implementation of restricted polygamy may be more realistic now that the women's NGOs have more material and symbolic power, and support from the government. The government has also put pressure on the media to change their discourses. Further, women have the plan and money from international NGOs. So, their claim may be realistic in the future. Many attitudes to women socializing in the public space have changed. Women now participate in call-in programs on the radio and participate in live discussion on air. At the university many women have male friends with who they can talk and chat, something that would have been unheard of a few years ago.

Thus, laws can be reformulated and cultural practices may be exposed to change. Even some verses of Quran may be exposed to different interpretations. However, there are some religious practices that may contradict the universal human rights and might not be exposed to contestation or bargaining. But, some argue that even those practices may be exposed to change

¹⁰² Article 2. paragraph A. No law that contradicts the established provisions of Islam may be established.

as there is another paragraph in the same article which states, that no law that contradicts the principles of democracy may be established. Therefore, based on the empirical examples and the confusion of the Iraqi constitution, one may state that every thing may be exposed to change. But this may take time and effort.

7.4 Conclusion

Chapter VII has concluded that women's empowerment in relation to men's empowerment is not static. The situation well corresponds with Freire's (2003) ideas that conscientization based on the pedagogy of change can transform violence to peace. Those who are oppressed can bring their oppression into awareness and mobilize themselves into action. Then it has outlined that the social role of women and their empowerment is gained through negotiation and contestation. Eventually, women's subjugation is changed in response to the living realities. Changes which look like progression may open new problems, at least for a short time, but there are reasons to believe that women's NGOs will be able to change the "situated knowledge" of people.¹⁰³ For example, women's empowerment can be beneficial for everyone in the society, and women have shown this through their new roles and responsibilities.

¹⁰³ "Situated knowledge" is knowledge that is specific to one culture within specific area. This knowledge is important for particular groups' explanation of action. This situated knowledge may be exposed to change due to social change or balance of power (Harstock 1996, Donna 1988).

Chapter VIII

Concluding Remarks

8.0 Introduction

The chapter gives an outline to the major finding of my thesis. Finally, I give some recommendation on how my findings can possibly serve as useful inputs in the work of ending the violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan.

8.1 Summary of the Findings

In the light of the great work by women's NGOs, this thesis has revealed that despite negative attitudes to their work in Kurdistan, often considered useless, they have made a great improvement in the status of women. Good results are achieved through their constant and courageous work in bargaining for women's rights.

The American invasion of Iraq, and the unprecedented social changes have worked in women's favor. As it has been stated, "Gender roles can be transformed by social changes, induced by economic transformation, incentives, legal and regulatory reforms" (World Bank 1994:67). With the support from international NGOs, local women's NGOs have been supported with information, financial support, and shelters, and are able to pressure the government to support more progressive laws. This has given women's organizations momentum in increasing their efforts in creating awareness about their sufferance, and to establish shelters for victims. As a consequence, more women have joined women's NGOs, their support has widened, and the pressure on the government has increased.

The KRG think they must do something to end the violence, since the Kurdistan political and economic situation intertwines with women's rights. Therefore, the KRG's support of women's NGOs is increasing. By 11/02/2009, they increased women's quotas in decision-making bodies from 25% to 30%, and this is to be implemented for the upcoming election in 19 May of 2009. The KRG has amended laws that were clearly discriminating against women. The KRG also supports women economically, for example, by favoring women in getting government agencies' work.

Women's NGOs have increased their programs in educating women about their rights,

and have increased their workshops. They have raised the issue of violence against women as a social problem, and have demanded urgent solutions. They try to change people's opinion. The international NGOs have helped local NGOs in building strategies that help them in strengthening the collaboration between, for example, the Women's Alliance of Political Parties (WAPP) and the Women's Protecting Rights Committee. This has strengthened state feminism and increased the pressure on the government to end violence against women. For example, they have recruited more women become police and judges in the court.

Through the work of women's NGOs people become aware of women's sufferance. This caused an increase in the rate of physical violence against women for the short time, but it is now reduced according to the 2008 statistics from the police directorate to trace violence against women.

The findings indicate that patriarchal norms and practices of the existing institutions overlap and reinforce each other. Thus the socio-cultural aspect cannot be neglected when combating violence against women. The findings also support Galtung's theory of cultural violence as a facilitator of structural violence and direct violence, and that one justifies and legitimizes the other. It has also identified how different types of violence interfere and strengthen the other types. The findings describe how women's organizations work and succeed in changing the situation. In addition, I have described the complex picture of different factors that interrelate in transforming women's suffering. Among other things, women's NGOs succeed in raising victims' voices and in putting their suffering on the government's agenda.

It has been suggested that cultural traditional practices will change gradually as people start to recognize the negative aspect of violence against women. Further, in my view, physical violence against women can be transformed when the subconscious contradiction becomes conscious and cultural practices which seem natural are openly discussed. For example, physical violence against women can be challenged through alternative interpretation and understanding of religion. Moreover, the government has reformulated laws on women's beating, made honor killers the same as murder, and banned female genital mutilation. Thus, women are able to improve their status if they are supported by the government.

8.2 Development of New Strategies and the Way Ahead

The majority of Kurds are Muslims. Islamic law (Sharia) is the basis of law in the constitution.

The constitution states that no law can be established against the Sharia, but it is also stated that there can be no law established against the principles of democracy. This indicates that Islamic elements in the law can be modernized to agree with the principles of democracy and social changes. However, it may also mean that some conservative elements will remain untouched. The KRG will have to synchronize the legal systems with the development of social changes, and in particular violence against women. This can be done, through debates on TV between religious leaders and human rights department representatives.

In order to avoid the repetition of raiding incidents such as at the Asuda shelter in May 2008, shelters must be given utmost protection. In fact, shelters should be treated as government agencies, where the employees get salaries, and the rent is paid by the government.

In addition, the government must introduce syllabi focusing on human rights, not only in primary schools as it is now, but at university and high school levels. The syllabi should include training in conflict resolution, nonviolent solutions, and peace education. This will benefit not only the women's issue, but many issues in society, since it is in the transition period from war to peace building. Instead, I have found and experienced during my teaching period, that the education syllabus focuses a lot on war, in particular the Middle East history of unending conflict, the Islamic history, and the history of Iraq in war time. This makes people demoralized, hopeless, and not peaceful. In addition, there is high intension of ethnicity and racism among the groups in Iraq. Therefore, subjects and syllabi about peace should include all the students, regardless of their interests, or subject field, and this can cover even the professors and teachers.

The definition of women's rights must be worked out and disseminated among all citizens. This includes recognition from the government that it will protect women's rights, especially the basic rights such as the right to education, to choose one's spouse, to claim divorce, to have a job outside the home, and to claim her share of inheritance. It will be best if information about these rights is disseminated publicly through TV and radio with explanations.

Information about how the law functions must be taught to people so they better understand what laws have been amended, and why they are amended. This makes the implementation of the laws a slow process, but people will perhaps easier acceptant amendments. Anyone should be allowed to lay charges against perpetrators of violence against women, since sometimes the victim does not dare to file a complaint against the perpetrator.

Moreover, women's issues must be discussed with both men and women. If only women know about their rights while men do not, this makes things worse for women, since men still rule over women, controlling their bodies and their movements. Women in Kurdistan are often like a puppet who does not speak, but act according to men's commands. Government and women's NGOs should have strategies and plans for their programs improvement. Changes in these programs and strategies should be made and studied by experts, and evaluated by scholars. Critical writing about the bad social habits of Kurdish societies should be encouraged. It should be discussed at universities by teachers, and students' writing papers about violence against women in the region, and how it can be resolved.

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I . Appendix of Some relevant of Iraqi constitution Laws

Article 2:

First: Islam is the official religion of the State and it is a fundamental source of legislation:

- A. No law that contradicts the established provisions of Islam may be established.
- B. No law that contradicts the principles of democracy may be established.
- C. No law that contradicts the rights and basic freedoms stipulated in this constitution may be established.

Article 14:

Iraqis are equal before the law without discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, origin, color, religion, creed, belief or opinion, or economic and social status.

Article 20:

The citizens, men and women, have the right to participate in public affairs and to enjoy political rights including the right to vote, to elect and to nominate.

II. Appendix of law amendment by KRG

“Law No. 7 of 2001 regarding exclusion of the wife from the rules of paragraph (1) of article (41) of Iraqi Penal Code No. III of 1969 which was giving eligibility to the husband to beat his wife for disciplinary purposes as (right utilization). By this amendment, the husband has no longer such right”.¹⁰⁴

“Law No. 8 of 2001 regarding the unjustifiable divorce. This law increased the compensative alimony of divorced wife (of such cases) to 3 years alimony instead of 2 years”.¹

“Law No. 9 of 2001 regarding imposing penalties against the husband as well in case of Fornication/Marital Cheating outside spouses home. Previously, penalties in such cases were used to be imposed on the wife exclusively”(Albustany 2005:137).

“Law No. 10 of 2001, which banned marriage to a widow without court's permission. This law is considered as a contribution to reduce the polygamy”.¹ Now there is a proposal to the KRG

¹⁰⁴ Harikar Non governmentetal organization 2008, Status of Women in Dohuk Society. Hawar printing press Dohuk. Iraq.

parliament to prohibit the polygamy.

“Law (item 409)No. 14 of 2002 regarding cancellation of (penalty reduction excuse) in case of family honor murdering crimes. In other words, man has no more eligibility for reduced penalty in case of murdering the woman for honor reasons”.¹

“Law of Wife's right or eligibility to alimony from the date of husband's dissatisfaction rather than the date of registering suitcase”.¹

“Law of sexual rape (item 423), the minimum penalty is 5 years prison and it can reach to execution/hanging if the rape was done by force or the victim was a taboo relative of the criminal. On the other hand the perpetrator will be released or tolerated if he takes the victim as wife. In case he divorced her before three years of marriage without any reasonable excuses, he will be accused again. After 3 years, he has the right of divorce”.¹

“Law of abduction (item 423) the minimum penalty is 5 years prison against the criminal and it can reach execution/hanging if the abduction was accompanied with sexual violence. However, the criminal may be released or tolerated if he marries the abducted”.¹

“Law of Female Circumcision (item 41/1) is considered as a kind of aggression that called (aggression by wound). The penalty of such crime is 15 years prison if the intention of creating a tare by the aggressor is proven”.¹

“Law No. 6 2001 amended it state that everyone who contracts marriage outside court will be imprisoned for no less than six months and no more than one year, or will be fined for no less than ID 3000 and no more than ID 5000. If he marries for the second time outside the court and already has wife, he will be imprisoned for no less than 3 years and no more than 5”.¹⁰⁵ The proposed draft to the KRG parliament is any one marries outside the court is subject to imprisonment of 1 to 3 years, any one who marries a second wife outside court is subject to

¹⁰⁵ Publication of Kurdistan National Assembly, Women Rights Protection Committee 2006 Bits of the reality of Kurdistan women 1992-2004 Iraqi Kurdistan as an example. Shahab Printing House. Erbil. Iraq.

imprisonment of 3 to 5 years.

Law of instigating someone to commit suicide Act No. 42 for 2004 states “anyone who instigates or aids, in whatever way, someone else to suicide, or becomes a party in the suicide action, will be imprisoned for no more than 7 years. The penalty will turn into detention when it merely becomes a suicide attempt”.²

Law draft of banning Misuse of Communication Services imprisonment from one to five years, and/or a fine of 1 to 6 million Iraqi Dinars “The kinds of misuse include threatening, disturbing, swearing, distributing, and publicizing private conversations; taking still or video pictures; sending disreputable SMS; any other action that results in defamation or involving a crime; or revealing secret information, whether correct or not, about the personal lives of the families and individuals”.¹⁰⁶

Law of forbidding child marriage, and “punishing relatives who force unwanted marriages or prevent wanted marriage”.¹⁰⁷

Law of Polygamy is more restricted recently than before, it can only take place on certain conditions, the approval from the first wife. The husband is financially capable. The approval of the court. In case the first wife has a chronic disease, unable to have babies.⁴

“The proposed amendment to the articles 24, 25 and 26 which describe the men’s responsibilities in financing the family. Is to be deleted and replaced by men and women share the responsibility of financing the family affairs and children each according to his/ her capacity”(Asuda NGO annual report of 2008).

¹⁰⁶ Kurdish globe newspaper issued in Erbil No:159.May22,2008. Date of access 17/01/09.
<http://www.kurdishglobe.net/servlet/WritePDFServlet?ID=128>

¹⁰⁷ Kurdish globe newspaper issued in Erbil No. 185. November 27 2008. Date of access
<http://www.kurdishglobe.net/servlet/WritePDFServlet?ID=158>

III. Appendix of Women National Organization (centre, union) and active NGOs in gender equality

1. Kurdistan Women Union (Zhinan).
2. Assyrian Women Union.
3. Kurdistan Women League.
4. Kurdistan Nationalist Women Movement.
5. Kurdistan Popular Women Society.
6. Kurdistan Women Union (Afretan).
7. Turkomani People Women Union.
8. Kurdistan Democratic Women Union.
9. Kurdistan Women Association.
10. Conservative Women Union in Kurdistan
11. Asuda Combating Violence against Women.
12. Ronakbery Media and Cultural Center for Women.
13. Nawa centre for women.
14. Saiah Anti- Violence Women Association.
15. Sabat Association.
16. Islamic Kurdistan Sisters Union.
17. Islamic Sisters Union.
18. Socialist Women Union.
19. Kurdistan Women Society.
20. Conservative Women Union.
21. Democratic Union for Kurdistan Women .
22. Kurdistan Women Movement.
23. Kurdistan Independence Organization.
24. Turkomani Women Union.
25. Khatoozin Center.
26. Massala Organization.
27. Women empowerment organization (WEO)
28. National centre gender for research
29. Women rehabilitation and preparation centre.

30. Saiwan women organization.
31. Alamal Association.
32. Kurdistan Human Rights Watch(KHRW).
33. Kurdistan Youth Empowerment Organization(KYEO).

IV. Appendix of International Women Organization

- 1- Norwegian People Aid (NPA). (Norwegian organization, one of its objective is gender equality and is very active in Kurdistan)
- 2- Diakonia (Swedish organization, one of its objective is gender equality and is very active in kurdistan).
- 3- Wadi (Germany international Organization dedicated in ending the FGM).
- 4- United States Agency for International Development (USAID).
- 5- Women Democracy Initiative (WDI).
- 6- National Endowment for Democracy (NED).
- 7- National Democratic Institute (NDI).
- 8- International Republican Institute (IRI).
- 9-the United States Institute of Peace (USIP).
- 10- United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

V. Appendix of National Newspaper and magazines issued by Women agencies and dedicated to women`s issues.

- 1- Helen seasonal magazine issued by Diakonia INGO.
- 2- Rewan Weekly newspaper issued by Ronakbery women information centre.
- 3- Khatuzeen monthly Magazine issued by Khatuzeen women centre.
- 4- Twar and Jin monthly magazines issued by PUK women union.
- 5- Danke Afftrat monthly magazine issued by KDP women union.

VI. Appendix of Radio independent women station dedicated to women issues.

- 1- Garmian radio station in Garmian district in Erbil sponsored by NPA.
- 2- Khatuzeen radio station based in Erbil.

VII. Appendix of Interviews

Date of interview: 06/07/08 Time:10:00am

The Organization`s name: KRG Parliament Erbil.

The interviewee`s name: Vian Silivaneyee Member of Parliament. Gender: woman.

Date of interview: 06/07/08 Time:1:00pm

The Organization`s name: Women Empowerment Organization (WEO). Erbil.

The interviewee`s name: Salih Omer. Gender: man.

Date of interview: 02 / 07 / 08 Time:10:00am

The Organization`s name: Radio Khatuzeen (Women Independent Radio Station). Erbil.

The interviewee`s name: Mahdia Nabeel. Gender: woman.

Date of interview: 03 / 07 / 08 Time:10:00am

The Organization`s name: Nawa Women Centre. Erbil.

The interviewee`s name: Nasreen Ahmed. Gender: woman.

Date of interview: 20 / 05 / 08 Time: 5:00pm

The Organization`s name: Women Alliance of Political Parties (WAPP). Dohuk.

The interviewee`s name: Farida Ahmed and other members of the Alliance. Gender: woman.

Date of interview: 28 /06 /08 Time:10:00am

The Organization`s name: Women Union of KDP(Afretan).

The interviewee`s name: Aisha and Vian Hirory. Gender: woman.

Date of interview: 09 / 07 / 08 Time: 1:00pm

The Organization`s name: KDP member Party.

The interviewee`s name: Zakia Sayid Salih. Gender: Woman

Date of interview: 15 /07 /08 Time:3:00pm

The Organization`s name: Cinema Arts Directories Manager, Woman Activist.

The interviewee`s name: Vian Maiy. Gender: woman.

Date of interview: 27/ 05 / 08 Time:10:00am

The Organization`s name: Ashorian(Christian) Women Union.

The interviewee`s name: Samaria. Gender: woman.

Date of interview: 27 /06 / 08 and 17/07/08 Time: 10:00am

The Organization`s name: Women Rehabilitation and Preparation Centre.

The interviewee`s name: Sumaia Saeed and Abdul Jabbar. Gender: woman, man.

Date of interview: 11 /06 / 08 Time: 3:00pm

The Organization`s name: PUK Women Union (Zhinan).

The interviewee`s name: Group of Women. Nadia, Jamila, Hadia. Gender: women.

Date of interview: 13 / 08 / 08 Time: 3:00pm

The Organization`s name: Concordia Local Organization.

The interviewee`s name: Dr. Barbara A. Lakeberg. Gender: woman.

Date of interview: 26 / 06/ 08 Time: 10:00am

The Organization`s name: Police Directory to Trace Violence against Women.

The interviewee`s name: Captain Sami. Manager. Gender: man.

Date of interview: 10 /07 / 08 Time: 1:00pm

The Organization`s name: INGOs Group Interview.

The interviewee`s name: Amal, Barbara, Jinar, Rahima. Gender: women.

Date of interview: 22/ 07 / 08 Time: 2:00pm

The Organization`s name: Women Political Parties organizations Group Interview.

The interviewee`s name: Maria, Suad, Wedad, Zahida. Gender: women

Date of interview: 14 / 07 / 08

Time: 2:30pm

The Organization`s name: Independent Women NGOs Group Interview.

The interviewee`s name: Hadia, Samira, Nazdar, Jamila. Gender: women.

Date of interview: 09 / 07 / 08

Time: 10:30am

The Organization`s name: PUK Women Union (Zhinan) Mass Media section. Suleiymania.

The interviewee`s name: Nasreen Abdulah. Gender: woman.

Date of interview: 10 / 07 / 08

Time: 12:00am

The Organization`s name: The National Centre for Gender Research. Sulaeiymania.

The interviewee`s name: Omed Hagi. Gender: man.

Date of interview: 09 / 07 / 08

Time: 1:00pm

The Organization`s name: Ronakbery Women Media Centre. Suleiymania.

The interviewee`s name: Hana Shwan. Gender: women.

Date of interview: 09/ 07 / 08

Time: 3:00pm

The Organization`s name: The People Development Association (PDA). Suleiymania.

The interviewee`s name: Ari Rashid. Gender: man.

Date of interview: 10 / 07 / 08

Time: 9:00am

The Organization`s name: Asuda Combating Violence against Women Organizatio.

The interviewee`s name: Dedarkhan. Gender: woman. Suleiymania.

Date of interview: 07/ 07 / 08

Time: 2:00pm

The Organization`s name: Norwegian People Aid Organization (NPA). Suleiymania.

The interviewee`s name: Aliakhan. Gender: woman.

VIII. Appendix of some Statistics of Honor killing, Women self immolation¹⁰⁸, FGM, divorce, marriage and child marriage.

a). The Honor killing: From 2001 till March 2003. In Erbil city **320** women has been killed. In Dohuk **390** women has been killed. While in Suleimania **189** women has been killed (Rahim and Shwan 2003:10-11). In 2007 (**93**) women has been murdered in Kurdistan (Kurdistan Youth Empowerment Organization report of 2008:44). In 2008 (117) have been killed and (333) have been burned.¹⁰⁹

b). The self immolation: in 2003 (**329**) women have burned themselves. In 2004 (**291**) women burned themselves. In 2005 (**778**) women committed self immolation. In 2006 (**812**) women committed self immolation (According to Suleimania Emergency General Hospital in Asuda Annual Report 2006:5). In 2007 (**964**) women committed self immolation (Kurdistan Youth Empowerment Organization report of 2008:44).

c). Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): "Report of Wadi NGO on June 2007 in Asuda Annual report of 2007 stated that during 2006 and 2007 1162043 girls were circumcised. In Erbil in 2002 and 2003 out of 4000 families 3070 women were circumcised. In Suleimania out of 4200 families 3065 were circumcised. In Garmian district of Erbil in 2005 out of 1544 families 907 girls were circumcised. In the same area in 2006 out of 1544 families' 310 girls were circumcised". The practice of FGM is not found in Bahdinan area (Dohuk).

d). Certified Marriages are decreased and Divorce cases are increased: Dohuk personal status court report indicated increase cases of divorce in 2007 and decrease cases of marriage compare to 2006. In 2006 there were 151 divorce cases and 4830 certified marriage cases. In 2007 there were 172 divorce cases and 3040 certified marriage (Asuda annual report of 2007). In 2006 Suleimania had 7893 marriages and had 3855 marriages in 2007 while they had 840 case of

¹⁰⁸ Based on Galtung ideas self immolation can take place when women cannot endured the situation under the high pressure from the communities and the social environment this leave behind psychological trauma. In addition, it might take place as the message of discontent about the situation because most of the time and based on communities ideas that women talk nonsense and she should be ignored. So, as the consequence, she may find this is the only way of delivering her message. Moreover, the investigation is less smooth than killing women, so women might be burned purposively.

¹⁰⁹ Quted in Evro newspaper number 277 page 14 date 25/02/09. Access date is 02/03/09.
<http://www.evropress.com/277-25-2-2009/277.htm>

divorce in 2005, in 2006 they had 1955 cases of divorce(based on Suleimania court of justice in Asuda annual report of 2007).

e). Child Marriage: during 1990 to 2001 Kurdistan had 27000 child marriages cases, while in 2006; there were only 5 cases of child marriage (Asuda annual report of 2007).